TRANSLATIONS FROM THE QURAN

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CONTENTS

Introduction

(1)

The Source of Faith

THESE translations were undertaken at a time when the only book to which I had access was the Quran.

As Muslims we believe that Islam represents a complete code of life. Yet, few of us make any effort to acquaint ourselves with the Quran which is the source of our faith. Those who have been educated in the Western tradition need to study the Quran with particular care so that they may either discard the pretence of being Muslims or adopt their faith as a matter of conviction. The present state of 'no-acceptance, no-rejection' makes our conduct ambivalent. Since all our actions are governed mainly by considerations of competition and success our formal attachment to Islam creates a dichotomy in our life. Whether this dichotomy exists or not is a question which everyone has to answer for himself. These translations may be of some help to those who recognise its existence and are anxious to resolve the contradictions which manifest themselves in our thoughts and deeds. The subjects which I have chosen, namely, justice, accountability, repentance, tolerance and faith are among those which have been particularly emphasized and repeatedly explained in the Quran. I have translated certain verses of the Quran relevant to these subjects largely on the basis of the exquisite Urdu Translation and the valuable explanatory notes in Tafheemul Quran, by Syed Abul Aala Maududi. In order to understand the framework of belief, within which we should organise our lives, and the scheme of values, according to which we should make our decisions, we must begin with the study of the Quran. This is not an easy task. The first hurdle is our lack of knowledge of the Arabic language. If one is not fully conversant with the literature and tradition of a language one tends to concentrate on words. Each word is rendered into its equivalent in Urdu with precision and accuracy. The perspective is often lost due to the rigid requirements of this exercise.

This tendency toward literalism, which some of the scholars cultivated assiduously, originally affected only the language of the translation but eventually influenced our approach to the Quran. Words and phrases were often selected and quoted in support of varying points of view. A single verse or a part of it would be recited to establish a principle. No doubt, there were scholars who took great pains to explain the background of every verse and present its historical context but the readers developed a tendency of complete subservience to words. Literalism has been one of the major causes of textual controversies leading to endless argument and discussion among the Muslims. Mohammed Abduh acknowledged his release "from the prison of ignorance into the open air of knowledge, from the bonds of literalism to the freedom of true belief in God."*

But for literalism the controversy about some of the later revelations abrogating the former (*nasikh* and *mansukh*) would not have assumed such a serious form. Those who concentrate on the essence of the Quran have no difficulty in understanding how certain decisions were modified as a community steeped in ignorance, prejudice, slavery and tribal hatred achieved emancipation and enlightenment through a persuasive and gradual process of education and reform.

The Quranic comment on literalism is most expressive:—

> God has revealed this Book to you.
> It contains two types of verses:
> the substantive, which are of the essence,
> and the illustrative.
> A twisted mind pursues the illustrative,
> and gives them meanings which create discord. (3 : 8)

Instead of concentrating on the essence, the literalists started another controversy regarding the verses which should be regarded as substantive (*muhkamat*) and distinguished from those which are illustrative (*mutashabihat*). Commenting on the special temptation which the illustrative (*mutashabihat*) pose for the mischievous and

*Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age by Albert Hourani. Page 131.

the immature, Kenneth Cragg writes, "history offers many examples of the kind of perversity which takes occasion from allegory, such as plain prose might have precluded. Anthropomorphisms can be distorted by literalists and so plague the labours of theology and the sensibilities of religion." He then quotes the following from Abul Kalam Azad's Tarjuman-ul-Quran: "So men of right understanding regard the *muhkamat*......as what primarily matter in the field of thought and action and do not run after the *mutashabihat*......since no probe into them will bear fruit."* It is literalism which encouraged some of the interpreters to apply the theory of abrogation to Hadith. Whenever they came across contradictory traditions they would try to reconcile them "by the theory of *nasikh wa-mansukh*."**

Perhaps the most unhappy effect of literal translation and interpretation has been the tendency to force the words of the Quran to yield meanings which would embrace a new idea or a scientific discovery. This is a common weakness among people who have only a vague, if not erroneous, understanding of the scientific discoveries which they would like to see forecast in the verses of the Quran. The Quran has to be read and understood as it is. Not as the Western mind would like it to be. The truth of the Quranic message does not depend on the extent to which its words can be made to reflect modern inventions. We feel that the West represents the highest level of enlightenment and progress so we are at pains to interpret the Quran in Western terms hoping that this might make it easier for our people, who envy the material advancement of the West, to confess that they believe in the Quran.

Apart from the question of language and the pitfalls of literalism anyone taking up an independent study of the Quran must face yet another problem: lack of encouragement from some of the Ulema who have taken the Book into 'protective custody."***

*The Mind of the Quran by Kenneth Cragg. Pages 44-45. George Allen and Unwin 1973.

**Muslim Studies by Ignaz Goldhizar. Volume II, Page 141. George Allen and Unwin, 1971.

***The Mind of the Quran by Kenneth Cragg. Page 55.

They fear that if everyone were to study the Quran independently it would undermine the cohesion of the community. Every reader will interpret the Quran according to his own light and this will cause confusion. Enough authoritative material is available and readers should follow the interpretation offered by recognised scholars rather than embark on personal study and research. How can a people who make no effort to understand the basis of their faith contribute to its growth through personal conduct? Ignorance may suit conformism but it is fatal for creative activity, and once a community ceases to be creative it must decline. The Quran warns against discord and emphasises that the believers should not "allow themselves to be divided into groups." (42 : 30). Jamaluddin Afghani felt that if the Muslims were to recover their dignity and pre-eminence it was essential first to 'restore the unity of the Ummah.' Hourani suggests that, "the unity of the Muslims was maintained by the political institution of the Caliphate and the Ulema who preserved the correct doctrine."* The institution of the Caliphate far outlived the unity of the Ummah and despite all efforts the doctrine became the victim of a great deal of controversy and dispute. History has disproved the view that the unity of the Ummah can be preserved through imitative adherence to an institution or a doctrine. Unity cannot take precedence over knowledge nor should it be pursued at the cost of principles. Unity is a social and political concept and as such it must be regarded as a means to certain ends. If the end is the solidarity and strength of the Ummah then unity is a means to that end. But unity is not a pre-condition of good moral behaviour. The Prophet did not establish a united Ummah before propogating the divine message—a message which was meant to be practised by each individual believer. Unity was the consequence of a code adopted by a number of people, each regulating his conduct according to the norms prescribed in that code and contributing to the gradual evolution of the concept of unity. A united people do not necessarily mean a moral people. Indeed, the reverse has some time been the case. A people

*Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age by Albert Hournai. Page 119.

can easily unite to purse immoral ends. The history of imperialism and colonialism is replete with such examples. The need for the unity of the Ummah persuaded Al-Ghazali to rule that "necessity makes legal what would otherwise not be legal." From this it was easy to argue that "any authority is better than confusion of opinions." And then to take the final step that "any ruler is better than chaos, no matter what the origin of his power." People were thus compelled to tolerate an existing order, however unjust its character, so as not to endanger the unity of the Ummah. In his 'tafsir, al-fatiha' Abduh wrote: "when the Islamic Law is fully understood and obeyed society flourishes; when it is misunderstood or rejected society decays." Abduh's imagination was fixed on the golden age of Islam which witnessed political success and intellectual development without a parallel in the speed and manner of its flowering. He identified 'excessive conformism' as one of the causes of the decline of the Ummah. "Even those who prescribed the essentials of the faith began to lose their sense of proportion and forgot the difference between what was essential and what was not. They began to regard the detailed social regulations of early Islamic society as having the same status as the principles of the faith and demanding the same unchanging and unquestioning obedience. This too was a sort of excess....an excess of adherence to the outwardness of the law......and from this sprang a habit of blind imitation (*taqlid*) which was far from the freedom of true Islam." He finds the spread of *taqlid* connected with the rise of the Turkish power. The Turks "encouraged a slavish acceptance of the authority, and discouraged the free exercise of reason among those they ruled. Knowledge was their enemy, for it would teach their subjects how bad the rulers' conduct was so they introduced their supporters into the ranks of the Ulema, to teach the faithful a dull stagnation in matters of belief and the acceptance of political autocracy."*

This should explain how conformism disrupted the unity of the

*Mohammed Abduh, 'Risala', Page 25 quoted by Hourani in **Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age. Pages 150-151.**

Ummah and corrupted the doctrine. By discouraging creative activity and freedom of thought the Muslims lost not only their position as leaders but also their unity as a people. The unity of the Ummah was destroyed not through knowledge but through ignorance and imitative conformism.

The present state of stagnation will not end until each one of us recognises his responsibility to make a positive contribution toward the rebuilding of our society on the basis of our faith—a faith which liberates man and offers full scope for the growth of all human faculties.

It is ridiculous to fear that independent study may create doubts and raise questions to which it may not be possible to provide an answer. The human mind must be persuaded by argument, illustration and experience. The tongue can be silenced, not the mind which demands satisfaction. And satisfaction is the pre-requisite of faith. The Quran is one sustained argument, from the beginning to the end, an exhortation, a warning, a persuasive presentation and painstaking presentation of ideas and principles. The life of the Prophet itself was a supreme example of persuasion. There was nothing arbitrary or dogmatic in anything that the Prophet did. Again and again, the Prophet was reminded by the Quran that his job was to convey the message. He was to communicate what was revealed to him and to model his own life according to that revelation. He was not appointed as a superintendent to maintain surveillance over the others or to become responsible for this conduct.

(2)

The Fundamentals of Islam

The question we are most afraid of is, "Does God exist?" We fear that a satisfactory answer to this question cannot be given. The parable narrated by Buddha of a man pierced by an arrow well-soaked in poison will be recalled. While his friends wanted to fetch a physician he said, "I will not have this arrow pulled out until I know the name of the man who shot it, and the name of his

family and whether he is tall or short or of medium height....until I know it is an arrow, or the edge of a knife, or a splinter, or the tooth of a calf, or the head of a javelin." The man died but without having found all these things. Questions of this kind "lead not to peace"* said Buddha. But questions of this kind continue to be asked and have to be answered. Though a man setting out to prove the existence of God may find himself compared to a clothes' moth, that eats Australian wool, trying to prove to "other moths that Australia exists."** Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God. Zarathustra asked the Saint in the forest, "And what does the Saint do in the forest?" The Saint answered: "I make songs and sing them, and when I make songs I laugh, weep and mutter: thus I praise God." Zarathustra wondered, "Could it be possible! This old Saint has not yet heard in his forest that God is dead?"** When philosophers concluded that God was only a symbol of man's fears neither God nor the fears of man disappeared. Did God create man or is it man that created God? To which it was replied that if God is infinite (according to the hypothesis) how could He be created by finite man? If the creation is a part of the process of cause and effect what was there before God? "There was no before", was the answer. The rationalists yielded place to the existentialists who rejected all philosophical or conceptual system and put their emphasis on individual existence. They protested against the notion, "that universe is a better system, whether one presided over by a creator God or a purely rational one developing in an evolutionary progress toward higher and higher goals." The French existentialists found existence 'absurd'. Kierkegaard emphasized the concepts of the individual, Jaspers spoke of contradictions, Heideggers' world excluded God and Sartre built his thesis round the concept of choice. But the existentialists demonstrated little beyond their disappointment with the rationalists. Kaufman has

*Majjhima Nikaya 1.63.

**Memories, Dreams, Reflections. C. G. Jung. Collins 1972.

***Thus Spoke Zarathustra by Friedrich Nietzsche.

recently carried out a detailed examination of the difficulties which the concept of God raises for man's sense of moral autonomy and responsibility. "If there is a God (in anything like the traditional sense) we men are not morally self-determining: we must conform ourselves, willy-nilly, to the divine will; we may not do whatever we choose."* The argument is that since God poses a challenge to man's will he must be discarded. Yet it is an undeniable fact of history that the concept of God liberated man, liberated him from the bondage of other men and enabled him to develop his potentialities to the highest degree. Kaufman suggests that even secular existence has become possible as a result of concepts of "ultimate importance" and "higher values". God has enabled "our secular existence itself to be freer and more open and thus potentially fuller and more creative."

In his lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought In Islam, Iqbal divides religious life into three phases: faith, thought and discovery. The first phase signifies a relationship of command and obedience. This is followed by an effort to construct a logically consistent view of the world with God as a part of that view. In the third phase one endeavours to come into contact with ultimate Reality. The Quran conceives of man as creative activity, an ascending spirit rising from one state of being to another. He supplements conceptual knowledge by perception of the heart which is a kind of inner intuition. The inner intuition is the essence of religious experience which, Iqbal says, is too enduring and dominant in the history of mankind to be rejected as mere illusion. The main characteristics of this experience are its immediacy, its wholeness and its ability to bring us into intimate association with a unique other self, momentarily suppressing the private personality of the subject of experience. This intimate association with the eternal gives us a sense of the unreality of serial time. Various arguments, cosmological, teleological and ontological, have been put forward by philosophers to prove the existence of God. Iqbal finds them inadequate on the ground that they look upon thought

***Gordon D. Kaufman. God, The Problem, 1973. Pages 13 and 268.**

as an agency working on things from without. Instead, thought should be taken as a potency which forms the very being of its material. Thus regarded, thought constitutes the very essence of the original nature of things infusing itself in them from the very beginning of their career and inspiring their movement to a self-determined end. From this, he argues, that consciousness is a variety of the purely spiritual principle of life which is not a substance but an organising principle. Taking the universe as a structure of events, possessing the character of a continuous flow, Iqbal compares it to our inner self where there is nothing static and concludes that as constant change can only be conceived in time conscious existence must mean life in time.

Our inner self has two sides, the appreciative and the efficient. The efficient self discloses itself as nothing more than a series of specific states. In this sense time and space are indistinguishable for the efficient self. In our constant pursuit of the external things we weave a kind of veil round our appreciative self from which we get alienated in due course. It is only in moments of profound meditation that we sink into our deeper self and reach the inner centre of experience where different states of consciousness melt into one another. The time of the appreciative self is a single Now. It is an organic whole in which the past is not left behind but is moving along with and operating in the present, and the future is present in its nature as an open possibility. To exist in real time is not to be bound by the fetters of serial time but to create it from moment to moment and to be absolutely free and original in creation.

The Quran conceives of God as the ultimate ego. His creativity consists of infinite possibilities of which the universe is only a partial expression. His other attributes are : creativeness, knowledge, omnipotence, and eternity. The universe is not an independent reality standing in opposition to God. Iqbal describes ultimate reality as an ego and concludes that from the ultimate ego only egos proceed. There is a gradual rising note of egohood until it reaches its perfection in man. Time is born with the act of

creation by which the ultimate ego measures the infinite wealth of its own undetermined creative possibilities.

I mentioned that various arguments put forward by philosophers to prove the existence of God were considered inadequate by Iqbal. It is hardly possible to summarize all the arguments but it would be useful to draw attention to some of the points made by philosophers on the question of God's existence. The argument which has exercised greater influence than others is known as "common consent." Since everybody really believes in God His existence must be accepted. Charles Hodge emphasized the innateness of belief in the dispositional sense and asserted that "men no more need to be taught that there is a God than they need to be taught that there is such a thing as sin."* The argument proceeds as follows : all human faculties and feelings of human minds and bodies have their appropriate objects and the possession of the faculties supposes the existence of those objects. Thus the eye in its very structure supposes that there is light to be seen. In like manner our religious feelings and aspirations "necessitate the existence of God." Hodge uses necessity to establish a link between God and the human mind. "It is hardly conceivable" he writes, "that a human soul should exist in any state of development without a sense of responsibility and this involves the idea of God—the responsibility is felt not to self nor to men, but to an invisible Being higher than self and higher than man."

In the last four centuries significant changes occurred in different fields of study and these had a profound effect on religion. The chief impact of science in the 17th & 18th century came from the revised picture of the cosmos that emerged from developments in astronomy and physics. The changed view of the history of life on earth presented by geology and evolutionary biology influenced religious thought in the 19th century. In the 20th century man's behaviour was investigated by social sciences. Explanations of human behaviour by the sociologists tended to rob religion of its singnificance. Marx treated religion as one of the ideological

*Systematic Theology, Volume 1. Page 199.

reflections of the current state of economic inter-relations in a society. Emile Durkheim developed the view that religious belief was no more than a projection of the structure of society. Freud thought that God was an illusion to be explained in terms of man's need to create a God in his own image. He deduced from psycho-analysis that God "really is the father, clothed in the grandeur in which he once appeared to the small child." Jung termed religion as an alternative to neurosis.

There is one element which is common in all these arguments that man needs God. What is disputed is the nature of the need or its continuation. The assertion that man needs God only when he is in distress only proves the existence of the need. Perhaps the real difficulty in accepting the existence of God arises from the fact that we make His existence dependant on our knowledge. The assumption that if one could see God there should be no difficulty in accepting His existence, reasonable as it appears, is not correct. Even seeing would not be sufficient evidence for those who would not believe : "If we were to open a door in the sky and they could walk through it, they would say, "our eyes have been deceived ; we are the victims of some charm."* When Khrushchev asked his astronauts in space to look for God he was not being original. Long before him a Pharaoh ordered his courtiers to raise a high structure and see if the God of Moses was anywhere in sight.

God reveals himself in the Quran as a Creator of the heavens and the earth, who sustains the universe. Whether you turn east-ward or west-ward you turn to God. He is closer to you than you think and He responds to you when you reach out to Him. You turn to Him and to no one else when you are helpless. He exists between you and your heart. He is eternal, the first and the last, the hidden and the transparent. God is the first fundamental of Islam.

The second fundamental is the Word of God as revealed to Prophet Mohammed in the Quran.

***Surah 15, verse 15.**

"The source of all names is the Word, for it is by the Word that all names are spoken." (Brihad—Aranyaka Upanishad).

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (St. John).

And finally the Quran asks Mohammed to :

"Speak the Word of God,
who created man from a blood clot !
Speak the Word of God, the most merciful,
who conveyed knowledge through the pen,
knowledge that man was not aware of." (96 : 1-5).

The idea of revelation is central to Islam. The process of revelation has been described as the flashing out of the divine light on the soul. In the Quran revelation is explained in surah 42, verse 51 : "It is not the status of man that he should be addressed by God directly. The Word of God is conveyed through revelation, or from behind a veil, or He deputes a messenger to reveal whatever He wills." For a Muslim the Quran represents the final and complete revelation of the Word of God. The Quran endorses all that was revealed earlier. It invites man to the right path : "The truth is that the Quran shows the straight path. Those who believe in it and conduct themselves righteously are blessed, but a painful end awaits those who do not believe in the hereafter". (17 : 10).

The Quran and the Prophet are inseparable. The Quran is God's command and the life of the Prophet the fulfilment of that command. The Prophet was entrusted the responsibility to communicate the revealed message and to make his life a model for others.

"Mohammed is nothing but a messenger. Other messengers have preceded him. If he were to die or get killed will you people revert to your old ways !" (3 : 144). The Prophet is told : "We have sent you as a messenger to the people and our word is enough. Whoever obeys you obeys God. You are not responsible for those who turn away. We have not appointed you as a guardian of the people." (4 : 80). The responsibility of the Prophet is clearly

defined : "O' Prophet fight in the cause of truth, but remember that you are responsible for no one except for yourself." (4 : 84). "Convey to the people whatever has been revealed to you by your God. If you fail in this you will have failed in your duty as a messenger." (5 : 68). The Prophet did not possess any heavenly treasures or secret knowledge. Nor did he have angelic powers. "I carry out whatever is conveyed to me as a divine command." (6 : 50). It was not his job, "to compel the people to accept the truth of what he was saying." (50 : 45). The Quran describes the Prophet as mortal like other human beings. His greatness lay in his wisdom by which he inspired men and raised "a poor and disadvantaged people to unpremeditated ambitions and surprizing powers."*

There are two aspects of the Prophet's life to which I wish to draw attention here. The first is the intensely human quality of his personality. He was kind and tolerant and profoundly modest even when he was the undisputed leader of his people. The Quran comments on the Prophet's temperament : "It is a great blessing that you are so affectionately disposed toward your people. Were you hard-hearted and severe of temperament you would have driven them away." (3 : 159). Even more human is the personal struggle of the Prophet during his mission. It is not that he knew the results of his effort in advance or that he was given any guarantee of success. He had to fight against odds like any other man, organising his resources as best as he could and utilising them in the most effective manner in the service of the cause to which he was dedicated. He experienced moments of anguish and distress and had to choose between alternative courses of action according to his own judgement. He sought the guidance and protection of God and prayed ceaselessly and with profound humility for the success of his mission. There were occasions when the Quran pointed out the weakness in a decision made by the Prophet. "It was not for the Prophet to have prisoners before the

*The Lessons of History by Will and Ariel Durant. 1968. Page 35.

enemy was liquidated." (8 : 67). When the Prophet granted permission to some people not to come out for Jihad he was told: "May God pardon you for giving them the permission to leave. You should have waited till it was clear who was telling the truth." (47: 4). "Pharaoh, belittled his people and they obeyed him in fear." (43 : 54). The Prophet elevated his people and they obeyed him in love.

The second quality lies in the model of leadership which the Prophet established for all times. He presented a unique concept of leadership not only in terms of personal character and achievements but also in terms of defining the future role of leaders in society. Leaders were to act as counsellors not commanders and they were to derive their authority from the people and from no other source. Since no one could claim access to divine revelation after the Prophet, religious authority ended with the Prophet. This is the central point in the concept of the finality of the Prophet.

As a matter of tradition Arab leaders did not have real authority over their followers* When Mohammed was recognised as the Prophet by all, he was also recognised as the leader by all. Since Arab society was not authoritarian, "the powers of the leaders were those of persuasion rather than of command. Of course, Mohammed's power as leader was significantly supplemented by his religious powers...... "It was clearly known that there could be no successor to him as the Prophet of God but he left the door open for a new leader to emerge." When Abu Bakr was chosen as the first Khalifa after the Prophet he had no religious authority and "his secular authority as a leader was kept to a minimum." This was the beginning of the institution of Khilafat but the powers of the Khalifa, though generally recognised, were not prescribed. By the time Umar succeeded Abu Bakr "he had already emerged as a man of proven ability and it was almost inevitable that he

*The quotations in this paragraph are taken from Islamic History 600-750. A new interpretation by M. A. Shahban, Cambridge University Press 1971. Pages 28-60.

should be chosen as leader." The choice of Umar signified the continuation of the office of Khalifa. It is during Umar's time that the title of *Amir al-Muminin* was introduced. The word *Amir* means commander, leader of the blind, advisor or counsellor. "Of these alternatives the last translation, as counsellor, represented best the essential realities of Umar's position." *Amir al-Muminin* was essentially a counsellor rather than a commander and people looked up to him as a "redresser of injustice." The title did not convey any religious authority over the believers. The tradition of electing a Khalifa through consensus was established with the election of Usman. The '*shura*' appointed by Umar to choose the Khalifa was the first Islamic council but there was no significant change in the powers of the Khalifa even after his election by the people. It was not until Ali that the suggestion was made that the Khalifa should have some special authority in religious matters, "as the Imam who would apply his knowledge to the achievement of justice for every Muslim." But the accepted view has always been that a leader in a Muslim community is the chosen follower of the Prophet who should act as a counsellor and justify the trust reposed in him by the people. Leadership in Islam does not visualize the domination of one man over his community. The chosen leader must not, under any circumstances, compromise or offend the concept of equality among men. The leader enjoys the status and powers willingly delegated to him by the community for the purpose of ensuring that the community should organise its life, individually and collectively, in accordance with the guide-lines prescribed in the Quran and demonstrated in practical terms in the life of the Prophet. The finality of the Prophet establishes the equality of man and his freedom to act according to his conscience in the light of the guidance provided by the Quran.

The third fundamental of Islam is belief in the hereafter. Human reason finds it difficult to accept the concept of the hereafter. Since our senses are accustomed to serial time we are unable to recognise the continuation of time beyond the capacity of our senses to experience it. That there will be a state of existence after

the present one is an assumption which is not supported by any rational evidence. Even more difficult to comprehend is the idea that there will be a final accounting of one's deeds after one has ceased to exist. The distinction between the present and the hereafter is of fundamental importance in the sphere of belief and human conduct. Those who believe only in the present act in a manner which is distinguishable from the manner of those who are conscious of the hereafter.

The word *Akhirah* used in the Quran, which is the equivalent of the hereafter, implies a state of existence which commences when the present state is terminated. The Quranic concept of the hereafter comprises the following three elements: (1) accountability and personal responsibility, (2) due process and, (3) complete justice. Each individual is ultimately responsible for his own conduct and it is in the hereafter that his conduct is finally evaluated though the consequences of his action may become evident in the present. This evalution follows due process in which evidence is produced and a just award is given.

To sum up, the fundamentals of Islam are belief in the unity of God, in the Quran as the last revealed Word of God, in the finality of Prophet Mohammed, and in the hereafter as the Day of Judgement. All Islamic institutions and laws are derived from these cencepts.

(3)

Secularism

If what has been stated above is the essence of Islam then secularism represents its complete anti-thesis. The word secular has two main branches of meaning: lasting or occurring for a long indefinite period of time, and non-spiritual having no concern with religious or spiritual matters. The first sense, which is directly taken from the classical Latin, is chiefly found in scientific reference to phenomena which are continued through the ages *e.g.* the secular cooling of the earth. In medieval and late Latin, saceularis meant that which belongs to this world. Secularism was applied, in general,

to the separation of state politics from church matters, and secular education reflected a system of training in which religious teachings were excluded. As a doctrine, "the essence of secularism is that morality should be based solely on regard to the well-being of mankind in the present life to the exclusion of all considerations drawn from belief in God or in a future state."* Abid Hussain has examined the implications of secularism in Indian society. He feels that the Indian Muslims have got a wrong concept of secular society and suggests as evidence "that in Urdu we translate the word secular as 'la-deeni' or 'ghair-mazhabi', or 'na-mazhabi'......words which imply opposition or indifference to religion. But the real meaning of secular is 'of the world, worldly'. He goes on to argue that things of this world are not necessarily opposed or indifferent to religion and that in fact some of them are very close to it and some form its essential parts. "The idea of secular state in most Western countries is that such a state is based on some of the highest moral values which all religions, most of all Islam, have emphasized.... the freedom of the human soul, eqality and justice."** This makes plausible reading except for the interpolation of the words 'the human soul' for which there is no place in secularism, whatever the Urdu translation of the word. The doctrine of secularism, is based on the well-being of mankind in the present life to 'the exclusion of all considerations drawn from belief in God or in a future state." Once these considerations are eliminated, the human soul, whether free or in chains, ceases to have any relevance.

The arugment that secularism does not mean the rejection of Islam is willingly accepted by the Western educated liberals in Muslim countries. Wilfred Cantwell Smith discounts the general impression of wide prevalence among both European and Muslims of different lands about Turkey, "that the modern Muslims in choosing secularism, have thereby rejected Islam."*** He describes

*The Cambridge Encyclopedia Britannica, 1911.

**The Destiny of the Indian Muslims by S. Abid Hussain. Asia Publishing House, London 1965. Pages 155-181.

***Islam in Modern History. Wilfred Cantwell Smith. Princeton University Press 1957. Page 172.

the anxiety of the Turkish elite, "to revitalise the traditions and values of their religious heritage so that these may be not only meaningful but creative in the new environment." The Turks abolished the Khilafat, 1924; forcibly dissolved the Muslim religious Orders, 1925; replaced the Sharia by Western based legal codes, 1926; deleted the clause: "the religion of the Turkish state is Islam", 1928; and substituted the Turkish for the Arabic call to prayer, 1933. Despite all this the Turks deny and even ridicule "the notion that, singly or nationally, they had renounced Islam." Smith reproduces a conversation which he had with a friend in Turkey as a typical expression of the liberal point of view:

> "There are three Islams: the religion of the Quran, the religion of the Ulema, and the religion of the masses. The last is superstition, obscurantism, fetishism. The second is bogged down with the whole weight of out-of-date legalism....impossible stuff making it necessary to get a fetva before one can have one's teeth fitted by a dentist. Turkey has got rid of the second. It was time to abolish it; we have thus led the way for the Muslim world. Islam needs a reformation. To this extent Turkey is still in the forefront of the Islamic world. The Arabs and other......silly people, tied down with their outworn narrowness......thought that Turkey was repudiating Islam. Not at all. Turkey simply took today the necessary salutary, reforming step of making religion what it should be, an individual personal matter, a thing of the conscience, a matter of private faith. The religious feeling is much too strongly embedded in the human soul for religion to be abolished. We have simply freed it."

This is not very different from the views of the liberal elite which one comes across in other Muslim countries. Their whole case is that the changes and reforms which they are proposing should be brought about within the framework of Islam and that their attitude does not imply the negation of religion. As Smith puts it they are looking for "a transformation within Islam and not outside Islam." The question is, what is it they wish to transform?

Surely, that it is more important than the framework in which the transformation should take place. Assuming what is proposed to be changed is the Islamic view of God, or of the hereafter then the entire framework would cease to exist.

We noted the interpolation of the human soul into the definition of secularism by Abid Hussain. His other suggestion that secularism is not the opposite of religion but of 'other worldly' is of equally doubtful value. How can secularism be the antonym of 'other worldly' when the only world which secularism recognises is this world? The secular doctrine rejects belief in a future state. When there is no other state except the present how can a non-existent 'other world' be presented as the opposite of this world which secularism recognises as the only state of existence. One detects a certain anxiety on the part of the liberals in Muslim countries to suggest that secularism does not necessarily imply the denial of God. Obviously, they are not fully converted to the doctrine of secularism. But secularism being the big reality of today, they do not wish to be treated as "silly people still tied down with their worn-out narrowness." They are prepared to concede the reality of the human soul and the strength of the religious feeling, which is deeply embedded in whatever there is inside man, but they would like all this to be carefully packed and deposited in a compartment labelled 'private affairs'. They employ the familiar stratagem of dividing life into two spheres of personal and public conduct. Secularism, they plead, allows you to retain religion as a thing of your conscience, a matter of your private faith. But religion must not be allowed to creep out of the bounds of privacy and encroach upon the sphere of public conduct. There is something patently arbitrary about this approach. Is religion a matter of shame, some sort of a hang-over of the past, which should be tucked away in a recess of private life? If that is so, our concern should be to save our lives from its pernicious effects. On the other hand, if religion is not a disability or a disease and is accepted as relevant and helpful to one's private life then where is the justification to exclude it from public life. It is not easy to

understand the distinction unless by private we mean our secret fears and hopes, loves and hates, frustrations and ambitions, secrets which we are either unconscious of or which we are incapable of expressing in any manner. Does all that remain hidden from the public gaze constitute private conduct? A crime which is never detected does not become a private matter because its perpetrator is not discovered. Does private mean that aspect of one's life which does not concern anyone else? If one lives in society anything worth doing or thinking must affect others. How does something which is good in private become evil in public or vice-versa? That which is private for one individual may be public for another. Some people live like an open book, others play it close to the chest. These are important questions which have never been fully answered. In any case how can the essential elements of faith be restricted in their application to a part of human life to the exclusion of other parts?

Take the basic tenets of Islam; belief in God, belief in the Quran, which implies regulating one's conduct according to the teachings of the Quran, belief in the finality of the Prophet, and belief in the hereafter. Which one of these concepts can be treated as relevant only to an individual's private life and repugnant or irrelevant to his public conduct. It would be illogical to suggest that privately one must believe in the unity of God while there should be no objection in public to submitting to other gods. Should one privately treat the Quran as a revealed Book, but in public have no hesitation in regarding other books as of greater relevance and significance, in view of what are called the contemporary realities? Is the hereafter a matter of conscience which has no relevance to our practical conduct? One cannot believe in any of these essential concepts in a partial or limited sense. If there is one God then there is no other God in public or private. If human dignity is compromised in public it cannot be retrieved in private. If the Quran is accepted as a book of guidance it must cover all facets of human life. If the hereafter is not relevant to public conduct it has no relevance to private conduct either. Human conduct is indivisible. A champion

of human liberty in private cannot be an instrument of oppression in public. A believer in the Day of Judgement cannot be oblivious of his responsibility to render a complete account of his life, private as well as public. Since neither the tenets of Islam nor the conduct of man is capable of division into private and public this whole exercise of treating religion as a matter of private faith is no more than a secular device to eliminate the influence of religion from public affairs.

What is it that makes a secularist diffident in stating his position in a straight-forward manner? An atheist denies the existence of God without hesitation. He entertains no doubt about his point of view and is fully prepared to face the consequences of his position. Not so a secularist. The reason is his total identification with material well-being. An atheist can renounce everything including the world. But a secularist lives for this world. All his pursuits are wholly materialistic. One recognises the value of money but money as the sole purpose of human endeavour is something which a secularist would not publicly admit. This is what forces a secularist to put up a facade of non-denial of God. He would like the people to believe that, contrary to his public conduct, he greatly reveres non-materialistic values in private life. Secularists can be aggressively charitable (provided the charity enjoys tax exemption) and they like to make a great show of their involvement with social causes. But all this is carefully calculated investment.

The fundamental assumption of secular philosophers is that material well-being in the present world is an essential means to human happiness.* But it does not remain a means. It becomes an end in itself. Pursuit of material well-being replaces happiness as an ideal. As secular society progresses from lower levels of material well-being to higher levels its concern for human happiness

* "Secularization is the hallmark of any modern economy which must operate without much concern for religion, ethics, aesthetics, or considerations of prestige. Its main orientation has to be toward maximum efficiency. In every type of social, political, or economic order, the modern economy must obey these principles. Its essential characteristic is a capacity for self-sustaining growth" Encyclopedia Britannica 1974 vol. 9, Page 523D.

disappears. Growth becomes the God of secularism, in place of the God of love. Inflation, its mortal enemy as the devil. Hell means high prices, recession, and unemployment. And paradise nothing but affluence, full employment and leisure. This image of paradise on earth was the inevitable result of the growing involvement of man with the present world. Various sciences contributed to man's conviction that everything in this world was capable of rational explanation and that it was possible to interpret and understand human life in terms of the laws of nature. Evolutionary biology explained the development of man from a unicellular organism to human species. Anthropological research explained how man had developed his physical and mental capacities in response to the demands of the environment. Physical sciences took up reality section by section and explained it in terms of mechanical development. Human conduct began to be viewed in relationship to certain imperatives; sexual, nutritional and territorial. Under the impact of all these philosophies and sciences man turned to the present world and to himself as the only reality and interpreted existence in terms of class conflicts, social structures, economic inter-relations in society and conflicts within himself. Since the present became the sole centre of his attention all his activities were directed to making the world as pleasant and enjoyable for himself as possible. He evolved elaborate codes of behaviour and rules of conduct which were aimed at ensuring that human beings in their anxiety to acquire goods and services for their well-being should act in an orderly fashion and not allow their aggression to interfere with the rights and opportunities of others. The enitre morality of acquisition was based on free enterprise and competition. While everyone tried to out-manoeuvre the others there was a tacit understanding that within the community unfair means will not be employed to deprive the others of their rights. A rigid materialistic morality was developed to regulate all economic transactions and dealings within the nation. Honesty was adopted as the best policy. A contract once made should be honoured. No one should rob another person of his property or possessions by force or fraud.

No one should be allowed to benefit from conditions which were controlled by a few to the disadvantage of the many.

Science was given freedom of investigation and experiment. As a result innovations and discoveries were made which completely transformed human life on some parts of this planet. Man extended his mastery over the environment and his reach to the satellites of the earth. More than anything else he developed a phenomenal speed in telecommunications which had the effect of establishing immediate contact between remote parts of the world. What used to take years to complete was accomplished in hours. Remains of past civilizations and excavations of ancient ruins convinced man of his predominance in the scheme of nature and of his great inventive qualities to master time and space. But all this converted human life into constant agitation with no point of rest. As he gained more he desired more. He spent all his time to save time and whatever he saved he re-invested to save more. He did not notice how little he was left with in his furious pursuit to conserve time and energy. His senses would not be satiated, his appetites would not be satisfied. Everything within him goaded him to higher levels of material well-being and what started as a perfectly legitimate idea turned into a senseless ideal. In the end he found himself in a state of nausea.

The secularists often suggest that people turn to religion when they are frustrated. When you are going full speed along the highway God takes the back seat. It is when you are going down-hill, and the brakes fail, that God is expected to take over the steering wheel. This is only superficially true though incidents of this kind are a regular feature of our life. The truth is that human beings do not cease to think about life beyond death or their relationship with God once they achieve a certain level of income. Why is there so much talk about God and religion in the industrially advanced countries of the West today? There must be something more than income that human beings crave for, something which escapes them in all the comfort available to them. If it were true that God exists only for the poor and the distressed

then why should the rich and the well-to-do suffer from discontentment. As "the soul-sickness of the rich" crept over him, Siddhartha watched the people in pursuit of material well-being, who are "always in love with themselves, with their children, with honour or money, with plans or hopes", and observed, that "the expression on the faces of these people is the expression of discontentment, of sickness, of displeasure, of idleness, of lovelessness."* Siddhartha's own life underwent a gradual change. The world and inertia crept into his soul like moisture entering the dying tree trunk, slowly filling and rotting it. "Like a veil, like a thin mist, a weariness settled on Siddhartha, slowly, everyday a little thicker, every month a little darker, every year a little heavier. As a new dress grows old with time, loses its bright colour, becomes stained and creased, the hems frayed, and here and there weak and thread bare places, so had Siddhartha's new life which he had begun after his parting from Govinda, become old. In the same way, it lost its colour and sheen with the passing of the years ; creases and stains accumulated and, hidden in the depths, here and there already appearing, waited disillusionment and nausea."

(4)

Material growth and its effects

The ideal of secular society was material advancement of mankind and, it must be admitted, that this ideal has been vigorously pursued, and substantially achieved, by the industrialised countries of the West. The consequences of material advancement are now overtaking the West. Today, the devotees of development find themselves perched on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand growth which was to usher in the millennium has created disturbing side-effects. On the other hand, any decline in growth is bound to bring about an inevitable deterioration in the quality of life. If growth continues at its present rate there is a possibility of disastrous deterioration in the material conditions of existence.

***Siddhartha by Herman Hesse, 1954. Page 62.**

Robert Heilbroner considers this problem in a recent book.* He begins by stating that the present malaise in American society reflects "the inability of a civilization directed to material improvement, higher incomes, better diets, miracles of medicine, triumph of applied physics and chemistry—to satisfy the human spirit." The values of an industrial civilization have lost "their self-evident justification." The continuation of growth has become a threat to existence because of (a) population growth, (b) the alarming capacity of destruction which man has acquired and the inevitability of "wars of re-distribution" which would be launched by the under-developed countries and (c) the absolute limit of the ability of the earth to support the present process of industrial activity. It is this last point which he proceeds to investigate in detail. "The ability of the earth to sustain the present industrial activity at its current rate of growth is limited by world resources and the tolerance of the ecosphere for the absorption of heat. The atmosphere receives the heat from two sources, the heat that enters from the sun or the earth and, the heat we add to the natural and unalterable flow of energy by man-made heat producing activities. The present emission of energy is about 1/15000 of the absorbed solar flux but if the present rate of growth continues for another 250 years emissions would reach 100% of the absorbed solar flux. The resulting increase of the earth's temperature would be about 50°C—a condition totally unsuitable for human habitation."**

The secular society cannot look beyond 250 years, if industrial activity continues to grow at its present rate. The secular man would make the atmosphere too hot for himself. Industrialism, socialism and communism are all instruments of growth evolved by the secularists. There is one common feature between capitalism and communism—both are committed to "productive virtuosity." Robert Heilbroner considers whether a change is possible within the two socio-economic systems which are the pillars of secular

*An Enquiry into the human prospects by Robert L. Heilbroner W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., New York, 1974.

**Economic and ecological effects of a stationary state by Robert U. Ayres and Allen V. Kneese 1972.

ideology. He examines various elements viz., political power, the cult of personality, the availability of force and the total pre-occupation of man under these systems with the present and concludes that a peaceful reorientation of life styles is not possible mainly because the secular man has lost his collective bond of identity with the future generation and he forecasts convulsive change which will be forced upon secular society by external events.

These events have already made an impact on western society. The God of growth has been laid low by the devil of inflation. "While the major international security issues of the last quarter century are still with us—the competition in strategic nuclear arms, the struggle of differing political systems, the confrontation of massively armed allies in Europe, the menace of great-power involvement in local conflicts—these are now being over-shadowed by the risk that the operation of the international economy may spin out of control. For if this happens there will be no graver threat to international stability, to the survival of western democratic forms of Government, and to national security itself."* Western economists have been carefully measuring the strides of inflation. By August 1974 it was 18% in Great Britain, 20% in Italy, 15% in France, 25% in Japan and 10% in USA. It is estimated that the oil bill will contribute $ 20 billion to the European balance of deficits. The whole of the west is protesting against the use of oil as a political weapon and threatening retaliation against what they describe as economic aggression. Celebrated economists talk glibly of stagflation and slumpflation. For more than three centuries the industrial west has been buying raw materials from its colonies at prices which forced millions of people to accept sub-human levels of existence. Wages were kept down in the colonies to ensure an uninterrupted supply of cheap labour. Now, at the first sign of the third and the fourth world venturing to ask for a reasonable price for their oil, and bauxite and copper, the whole of the industrial world has worked itself into a state of

*Walter F. Mondale, Foreign Affairs, Volume 53, October 1974.

righteous indignation. President Ford talks of "securing, if necessary, by force the world's natural resources." The West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt said in a Nato meeting that, "inflation and the necessarily following recession pose the greatest threat to the foundations of western society." That inflation should injure the economists of the west is understandable. What is difficult to understand is how it has become an insult to their innocence. Since they have studied the causes of inflation and stagflation in so many countries under their control they must be familiar with the operations of the market forces? If moral considerations were not relevant when they had the developing countries and their resources under their control how have they become of paramount importance now? The meetings of the Gatt and the endless Kennedy rounds provide enough evidence of the amused indifference with which the pathetic pleadings of the poor countries were received by their rich masters.

My purpose here is limited to pointing out that the secular system based on economic growth is disintegrating. The rise in prices is not just a threat to economic prosperity. It has turned into "the greatest threat to the civilization of western society." This is conclusive proof of what I am trying to suggest that the western civilization has equated itself with the money market. The secular politicians have dropped their guard of moral principles. They admit that prices occupy a pivotal position in the western way of life and if prices cannot be controlled the west must face extinction. The secular morality, whatever its specifications, cannot survive in a state of inflation. It was good to talk about principles and ethical values when prices were under control and production was touching optimum levels (at the cost of others) but now when the others had started asking for their share of the material world morality was becoming a nuisance. Morality was good investment when dividend vouchers were drawn in favour of the west. It was now becoming a threat to western civilization. And the only answer to this threat which the west has been able to discover, so far, is to re-value its gold reserves!

(5)

The collapse of western institutions

I submit that the secular society is facing an institutional collapse. The situation has not come about as a result of any external challenge but as a direct consequence of a fundamental duality which has gradually destroyed the basis of every secular institution. The principal institutions of secular society were: (a) the legistature which comes into existence through a process of free and fair elections, (b) the judiciary which occupies a pivotal and independent position, (c) the executive, which obeys the legislative and the judicial sovereign and, (d) the press which is the popular instrument for the formulation and expression of public opinion.

These institutions were established and developed according to precise theoretical concepts and the ideals which they represented reflected the moral values of secular society. These institutions were evolved under a democratic system. The citizen was assured of his fundamental rights and equality of status and opportunity. The system of elections was to ensure the liberty of the individual to choose the person whom he would like to place in a position of authority over himself. The independence of the judiciary was not only guaranteed but zealously guarded by the society. The executive played an objective and faithful role, while the press was the keeper of the conscience of the people. These were high ideals to which the institutions of secular society were dedicated. Yet each one of these ideals was betrayed. How did this betrayal come about? I stated earlier the duality in secular profession and practice. This duality is the result of three fundamental separations: the separation of the Church from the State, the separation of public from private conduct, and the separation of national from international conduct. The first two separations are well-known. It is the third separation, the one between national and international behaviour, which is of particular relevance to my thesis. The double standards which imperial powers applied to their conduct at

home and to their conduct abroad emerged from this separation. The system of free and fair elections was good at home but not for the colonies where the natives had to be educated and controlled before they could be trusted to understand what was good for them. This was the only logical position which the rulers could adopt when force was the real sanction behind their power. The suggestion that the imperial powers conquered and subjugated vast territories only to educate the conquered people so that they may liberate themselves makes no sense. The education offered to the people in the colonies was meant to alienate them from their own cultures rather than to prepare them for the future. The whole legislative arrangement was an elaborate hoax. The judiciary administered a legal system alien to the people and maintained an august judicial pretence. The judiciary was one of the major instruments of imperialism. There was no freedom which was not suppressed and countenanced by the judiciary so long as the law was not violated. The judiciary administered unjust laws with complete justice. It was the independence of the judiciary which provided the rulers with a machine for the continuance of unjust laws, a machine which appeared impersonal and inspired confidence. This again was understandable because in secular society the judiciary was assigned a definite role : to interpret and to administer the laws. The judiciary was not permitted to extend its jurisdiction or independence to question either the purpose or the substance of laws framed by the rulers. They could not question acts of state or their application, which was often invidious. The executive objectivity which was a guarantee for the citizen at home, became a justification for servility in the colonies. The press, an instrument of free expression of views at home, was used to control and influence the intelligentsia in the occupied territories.

These double standards were pursued by imperial powers as state policies and few people questioned the arrangement. Every single element in the economic system of secular society, the mobility of labour, the mobility of capital, and the free inter-play of market forces was violated in the colonies, where people were treated

as a vast pool of cheap labour. The entire secular world which claimed to cherish fundamental and universal human rights willingly and deliberately, pursued policies which had no other aim but the debasement and exploitation of a major portion of mankind. Frantz Fanon's works describe the experiences of the subjugated people in a vivid and compelling manner. One of his books opens with a telling quotation, "I am talking of millions of men who have been skilfully injected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair, abasement."*

The secular society made a fundamental mistake of judgement when it assumed that one's conduct at home would not be influenced by one's conduct abroad. This was a natural corollary of the assumptions that private conduct had no relationship with public conduct or that the State had nothing to do with matters of personal belief and conscience. When an ambivalent arrangement, of which the sole aim is exploitation, is pursued over a period of time it is impossible that it should not influence the character of the people engaged in it. The methods which were evolved to promote the policies in the colonies were bound to find their way into the working of similar institutions at home. This, more than anything else, has been responsible for the erosion of secular institutions. That the process of erosion went unnoticed for such a long time proves that a fraudulent system was accepted as a way of life. The west had to meet its Watergate to discover that its duplicity abroad had destroyed its base at home.

(6)

The future of the Muslims

Do the Muslims have a future in the modern world? This is a question which Orientalists and Western sociologists are never tired of posing. Whether it is Wilfred Cantwell Smith or Albert Hourani or Rosenthal they are all in agreement that Islam has become a decadent force and that its adherents have failed to "establish com-

*Black Skin White Masks by Frantz Fanon, Quotation from Aine Cesaire, Discourse Sur le Colonialisme, Paladin 1970.

patability of religion and modern sciences."* The efforts of Syed Ahmed Khan are recalled as one of the pioneers who tried to bring about among the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent "a religious revival and an accommodation, if not an integration, with western culture and civilization."** Wilfred Smith examines the predicament of the Muslims with great feeling and at even greater length. He identifies the fundamental malaise of modern Islam as "a sense that something has gone wrong with Islamic history." He suggests that the fundamental problem of modern Muslims is "how to rehabilitate that history; to set it going again in full vigour, so that Islamic society may once again flourish as a divinely guided society should and must." Wilfred Smith observes three outstanding new tendencies of modern Islam; nationlism, apologetics and dynamism. Nationalism was taken up by the Muslims on the western pattern though their emotions were significantly Islamic. As a result no Muslim people have been able to evolve a national feeling, meaning "a loyalty to or even concern for a community transcending the bounds of Islam." He then notes the considerable literature produced by Muslim scholars in defence of Islam which he, quite appropriately, describes as apologetics. The whole effort is "not to re-think Islam, but to rethink its defences." Dynamism among the Muslims means "a stirring of intense, even violent, emotionalism."*** Various Muslim scholars have elaborated the same theme and the view is generally accepted that unless the Muslims re-interpret their faith in the light of contemporary realities and evolve a synthesis between Islam and secularism they are unlikely to survive. If one forgets the rhetoric it means simply that the future of the Muslims depends on their willingness and capability to adopt the western way of life. Faced with this situation liberal Muslims devoted much of their energy to finding rational explanations for Islamic beliefs and laws to make them acceptable to the western mind. At the other extreme were the orthodox

*Islam in the Modern National State. E.I.J. Rosenthal, Chambridge 1965. Page 345.

**Ibid. Page 345.

***Islam in Modern History. Wilfred Cantwell Smith. Oxford University Press, OUP 1957. Chapter 2, Pages 42-92

Muslims who rejected all that the west stood for, whether it was philosophy or science or technology. The various institutions and systems of economic growth which secularism developed e.g. private enterprise, industrialism, socialism and communism were not treated as economic programmes or institutions but as full fledged ideologies standing in opposition to the Islamic ideology. The result was that a vast majority of Muslims came to believe that their salvation lay in denying themselves any knowledge or technology offered by modern sciences. Their sole concern was to preserve the essentials of their faith and they thought that by shutting out all the forces of change they will be able to protect their faith. In the course of time their attitude became totally negative. They developed resentment against philosophy, against science, against technology, even when their whole way of life and thinking was affected by philosophic methods, scientific research and technological innovations. They would sullenly accept whatever conditions were imposed upon them and not raise a voice of protest lest this should create disruption among their ranks. They would not attempt direct understanding of the sources of their code of life lest this should give rise to new ideas and divide the community. They would not allow any change lest this should contaminate their faith. They convinced themselves that determined resistance to change was the greatest service they could render to Islam as by doing so they would be preserving its original purity and glory. That they were closing all avenues of creative activity on themselves and on the cammunity did not worry them. Too late, they realised that what they had managed to save was the form without the spirit. Their critics did not fail to observe the state of decay and stagnation in which they plunged the Ummah, and concluded that Islam, as a cultural force, had ceased to be operative and that Muslims were an anachronism in the modern world. They patiently expressed the hope that Muslims would either politely disappear or gradually get absorbed in the main-stream of western culture.

The future of Muslims in the modern world cannot be considered in isolation. We have first to consider the future of man. The

future of Muslims can be considered only as part of the general problem of the future of mankind on this planet. The secular civilization of the west is facing a grave crisis and its entire institutional framework is in a state of collapse. It is against this perspective that one should consider the problem of Muslims in the world today.

There are two ideas about Islam which have been widely propogated by some of the Orientalists and Western political thinkers. The first of these is that the history of the Muslims over the last 1300 years presents a dismal spectacle of forceful subjugation of people, suppression of all freedoms, and an inherent inability to assimilate other cultures into a broad Islamic culture. The second is that Islam has no future in the modern world because it has failed to evolve any institution which could ensure its continuity. Even a system of succession for the smooth and peaceful transfer of power was never developed, and the central authority always found it difficult to establish a fair and workable relationship with out-lying territories. Islamic rule has been dictatorial and centralised. Most of the Islamic rulers succumbed to visions of personal glory and the restraints of Sharia were used, with the help of obliging scholars, to maintain autocratic control. Some of the Muslim rulers openly flouted the Sharia and subservient Ulema were always available to justify their conduct in the name of the unity of the Ummah. The case of Allauddin (1296-1316) is quoted to show how Muslim rulers issued commands according to their own whims which were not always in conformity with the requirements of the Sharia. "I do not know whether such commands are permitted or not by the Sharia. I command what I consider to be of benefit to my country and what appears to me opportune under the circumstances. I do not know what God will do with me on the Day of Judgement."* Mujeeb, to whom I owe this quotation, makes an important point when he says that some of the Ulema identified the right of a Muslim ruler with his power, and obedience to a ruler was turned into almost a religious duty for the Muslims while the ruler was under no obliga-

*Indian Muslims by M. Mujeeb, Page 73.

tion to the people and could be deprived of authority only if he apostatised. "This plunged orthodox Muslim thought into gross inconsistencies, wrecked its moral position and proved, both in India and elsewhere, disastrous to the Muslim community."* The failure of the Muslims to maintain the unity of the Ummah, except for a brief period, is a favourite theme with western historians. Not very long after the death of the Prophet, "was seen a curious spectacle of four different standards planted near Mecca, belonging respectively to four Chiefs, each of whom was a pretender to the empire : the standard of Abdullah Bin Zubair Caliph of Mecca ; that of the Caliph of Damascus Abdul Malik ; that of Ali's son, Mohammad Bin-Al-Hanafaya, Medhi of Shiites ; and that of the Kharajites, who were at that time under the command of Najda Bin Amir."**

Not all that is said by western scholars about Islamic history and the conduct of Muslim rulers is untrue. There is no doubt that the Ummah was disrupted not as a result of conflicting interpretations of the Islamic doctrine but mainly as a result of the struggle for power. There were Muslim scholars who played dubious, and not infrequently subservient, role in their eagerness to interpret Islam to suit the wishes of the rulers. There is no denying that Islamic history contains several depressing instances of ruthlessness and suppression. Force was used by many rulers to promote their own cause rather than the cause of Islam. As the earlier commitment to Islam weakened pursuit of power became an end in itself and the Muslims, while continuing to profess that they belonged to a religion which represented the ultimate ideal for mankind, alienated themselves from the essentials of their faith. Muslim rulers, with a few exceptions, played power politics, while the people were made to endure humiliation and exploitation in the name of Islam.

This is one side of the picture. The other side is that Islam brought to mankind, in the 7th century A.D., a message of hope and freedom and this message spread from one end of the world to the other in an incredibly short time. The Muslims displayed

*Ibid. Page 64.
**Encyclopedia Britannica.

unique dedication to a cause and profound identification with a common faith and community. "Islam acquired its characteristic ethos as a religion, uniting in itself both the spiritual and temporal aspects of life, in seeking to regulate not only the individuals' relationships to God (through his conscience) but human relationships in a social setting as well. Thus there is not only an Islamic religious institution but also an Islamic law, State and other institutions governing society." Western sociologists have tried to explain the spread of Islam due to causes such as lack of protein in the diet of the people in certain areas, facilities for widow marriages and certain other socio-economic inequities which Islam helped to remove. The facts, however, show that the achievements of Islam during the first few centuries were unparalleled in the history of man. Not just in terms of the areas which came under the influence of Islam but in the liberation of the human mind and the development of human personality under the impact of Islamic ideology and the life of the Prophet. Granted that the Muslims have been in a state of stagnation for the last five centuries. How does one infer from this that Islam is the cause of this stagnation or that Islam has nothing more to offer to mankind? The laws of the rise and fall of nations and the growth and decline of societies cannot be limited in their application to a few centuries. Islam continues to be the only ideology available to man for his fulfilment. Capitalism, socialism and communism are not ideologies, they are at best strategies of economic growth. None of them profess to deal with the problems of creation, life after death, the existence of the soul, and contentment of the mind. To them all these considerations are irrelevant. They concentrate on theories of development and on programmes for the material advancement of man in the context of the present. Even future generations have only a marginal relevance to these material strategies. Western scholars assume that the Muslims, being economically backward, must be facing a great dilemma : how to

*Encyclopedia Britannica.

reconcile a lagging faith with the march of science. They evaluate Muslim history in purely material terms. So long as the Muslims were in power, which is the hall mark of superiority and progress, they were regarded as dynamic. The moment they lost political power, and were subjugated by more forceful adversaries, they were condemned as a stagnant people. Once Muslim power declined the western historians rejected the Muslim faith and culture as of no consequence. Our own thinkers today look for Islamic culture not in the essentials of their faith but in clay, pigments, arches, rhythm and movement.

Islamic culture exists within the framework of its belief and can be seen only in relation to the code of life propagated by the Prophet. *Tauhid* is the root of Islamic culture, and it is this idea, more than any other, which had the effect of releasing man from the bondage of man. The human mind found its final emancipation in the completion of divine revelation. Thereafter, man was free to exercise all his creative faculties without having to accept the status of subservience in relationship to any other man. The finality of the Prophet signified a fundamental cultural advance in human history. The other essential elements in Islamic culture are : (1) balance and moderation, and (2) personal accountability in a framework of complete justice. Material pursuits as an end in themselves have no place in Islamic culture. "This craze for competing with others to acquire as much of the world as you can has plunged you in a stupor, and there you remain till you are lowered in your grave".

(102 : 2).

The consciousness of the existence of life after death and the reality of the Day of Judgement, when everyone will be called upon to render a complete account of his life, fundamentally influenced man's conduct and created a new cultural environment in which individual and social behaviour acquired a new context and purpose. The fact that some of the Muslim rulers failed to act according to the revealed code is no reflection on the code. I am not unconscious of the argument, which is often advanced, that if the Islamic code was not put to actual practice, except for a very brief period, does it

not show that there is something defective or lacking in the code itself. It is essentially a secular way of judging human effort in terms of material results. The Islamic code must be judged on its own merits and not on the basis of the conduct of those who profess to subscribe to that code. No one has identified any defect in the code or in the scheme of values which the code prescribes. The defects have all been traced back to human failings. The code recognises the weakness and temptations which afflict man and it also provides that those who do not live by the code will not be saved from the consequences of their behaviour merely because they profess to be Muslims. The Quran grants no particular privilege to believers whose profession is not supported by their performance. Divorced from conduct, profession has little value. The Quran points out instances of nations and civilizations which came to grief because they did not act in the right way.

> "There have been many periods of history before you. Look around and you will see the end of those who disbelieved" (3:137).
>
> "Have they not seen how those nations which achieved great eminence in their day were destroyed?" (6 : 6).

Those who adopt unjust ways come to an unhappy end. The decline begins when a people adopt oppressive ways, and if they persist in their unjust conduct their eventual extinction becomes inevitable.

> "How many gardens and springs and fields and exquisite palaces did they leave behind....When the end came neither the heavens nor the earth shed any tears, nor did they receive extension to reform themselves." (44 : 99).

The Muslims are no exception to this rule. When they adopted hypocritical ways and identified themselves with material pursuits they could not escape the consequences of their conduct. Ideology is always the first victim of power. Those who pursue power enter a charmed circle, and with every step that they take toward the centre of power, a ribbon of gauze is wrapped around their eyes, until they became blind to everything except their own survival and

supremacy. The reverse is also true. With every step that they take away from the centre of power the gauze ribbon is unwrapped. Once out of the circle they begin to see the truth again. The Muslim empire could not exist regardless of the conduct of the rulers and if their conduct was divorced from the code they could not be saved from the disastrous consequences of their actions.

When western political thinkers and historians comment on the stagnation of Muslim culture and the torpor of Muslim mind they fail to take into account the fact that the present situation of the Muslims is the inevitable result of prolonged colonial exploitation. The Muslims must be held primarily responsible for their downfall, but the Imperial powers set about the task of deculturising them in a scientific manner to ensure that they should not be able to recover and re-organise themselves into a vital force. A liberal elite was created who treated their own faith and history with indifference, which gradually developed into unconcealed contempt. A sense of inferiority was injected into the masses who were looked down upon for their primitive ways. A native was an outcast whose proper place was the jungle. The westernized few among them, with their talk of progress and the requirements of science, stood out as a symbol of success for the rest to emulate. In the course of time the Muslims were alienated from their moral values and norms of conduct. The colonial masters did not destroy the Muslim culture. They caused it to stultify so that it should become a source of embarrassment and shame. Frantz Fanon uses the word 'mummified' to describe such a cultural condition. In his essay, "Racism and Culture" he explains that "the setting up of the colonial system does not of itself bring about the death of the native culture. Historic observation reveals, on the contrary, that the aim sought is rather a continued agony than a total disappearance of the pre-existing culture. This culture once living and open to the future, becomes closed, fixed in the colonial status, caught in the yoke of oppression. Both present and mummified it testifies against its members." Once the Muslims were subjugated the conquerors closed the door to the future on their culture. A selected few were

admitted to the educational institutions of the west and turned into a power elite to exercise authority over their people on behalf of the masters. This class consisted of westernised politicians, bureaucrats, teachers, lawyers, judges, journalists and merchants and their views became the representative expression of 'the hopes and aspirations of the people'. The Orientalists found in these views a complete endorsement of their own theories, but they forgot that they were really quoting themselves, because the liberals among the Muslims did not say anything original. They dutifully reproduced whatever they were taught.

The point about the failure of the Muslims to evolve suitable institutions to ensure the continuity of their culture requires detailed examination which is not possible here. The secularists talk of institutions as if they represent the final solution to all human problems. Institutions are man-made arrangements. It is the willingness of a people to submit to an arrangement which gives it the status of an institution. Tribes are as much an institution as a parliament. Islam introduced a new idea, which radically altered the complexion of all existing institutions, when it insisted that no arrangement should be recognised unless it was based on equality, justice and accountability on the Day of Judgement.

Islam gave to the world the institutions of equality, freedom and the indivisibility of the human race. These institutions are now recognised as fundamental human rights. The Muslims established the institution of selection of the leader through consensus (*Ijma*). In one magnificent stride the Prophet of Islam left behind all the inequitous and oppressive customs inherent in hereditary succession, monarchy and racial distinction. As a faith, Islam introduced the concept of tolerance and moderation. The equality of rights and obligations of every individual was given institutional recognition in all spheres of life. The administration of laws, without discrimination on grounds of race, colour and language, was not known as an institution before the advent of Islam. These are the institutions which, even today, inspire the Muslims throughout the world and bind them in a vision of unity.

They command the voluntary allegiance of every Muslim to whichever nation he may belong. But institutions survive and glow in the light of freedom. They are obfuscated by clouds of domination. The secular institutions under which the Muslims are forced to live today are a gross imposition, a legacy of imperial exploitation. These institutions were introduced as instruments of oppression and were devoid of equity in their operation. They do not inspire any respect or confidence. The Muslims created the finest institutions in human history and failed to live by them. The secular institutions have exhausted their possibilities. Man is looking for faith again. History has offered the Muslims yet another opportunity to prove the effectiveness of their institutions. They can do so through pursuit of knowledge and creative activities in the light of the Islamic principles of freedom, equality, tolerance and personal responsibility.

I return to the point which I made in the beginning: the need for each one of us to study the Quran independently and conscientiously. This is the only way to avoid imitative conformism and to contribute to the creative resurgence of the Muslim community. These translations are intended to encourage the readers to seek direct inspiration and guidance from the Quran. I mentioned earlier that these translations are based on the Urdu rendering and commentary contained in the six volumes of Tafheem-ul-Quran by Syed Abul Aala Maududi. When these translations first appeared in Dawn, I explained how I was introduced to Tafheem-ul-Quran. I first read the translation of sura Yusuf in the second volume. It was a most moving experience for I had not come across anything so lucid and precise in Urdu. The simple language in which the verses of the Quran have been rendered in Tafheem-ul-Quran conveys the meanings vividly without employing archaic or ornate diction. The spontaneity, warmth, and precision of language, which is characteristic of Syed Abul Aala Maududi's style, comes from a profound understanding of the Quran, the life of the Prophet, and Islamic history. The approach is always objective and the exposition illuminating. Not extraneous ideas are introduced and the sole concern of the

author is to bring the reader into immediate and intimate contact with the original. I have included the preface and the *muqaddemah* of Tafheem-ul-Quran and included them in this volume. Both these are most thought provoking and I found them particularly useful in my study of the Quran.

(8)

Acknowledgements

I must recall, with deep gratitude and respect, the debt I owe to my late friend Mr. Manzur Qadir. He took particular interest in these translations and gave me valuable guidance. My wife and children have been closely associated with this work and my brother, Tajammul, read the manuscript with great care and suggested several improvements. I must also thank Miss Roshni Mody who typed the draft with diligence and precision.

ALTAF GAUHAR

3rd February, 1975.
Karachi.

Part ONE

لَآ إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَد تَّبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ
(البقرة : ٢٥٦)

In religion there is no compulsion.
Right stands distinguished from wrong. (2 : 256)

1

From the Preface to Tafheemul Quran

TAFHEEMUL QURAN is not a literal translation of the original text. It is an attempt to present the meanings of the Quran in plain language keeping the historical perspective in view. Literal translations of the Quran have great value of their own but the rhythm of the original, the ecstacy of its expression and the delight of its diction is often lost. The Quran speaks to you in the language of life, vividly and melodiously; its sparkling cadence invigorating the mind, and its impassioned notes stirring the soul as if a storm were raging in the heart. By comparison the language of the translation is a poor echo of the glorious original, so lifeless and insipid that one is left completely cold and begins to wonder whether this indeed is the Book which has no equal in the world. A flame runs through the words of the Quran but gets snuffed in the translation. The spirit of spring in full bloom seems to vanish leaving behind a trail of dry brown leaves.

The Quran is great literature as it is great instruction. Its words go straight to the heart and it is this quality which, like a crack of lightning, shook the length and breadth of Arabia. The opponents of the Quran knew the force of its impact and employed all possible means to prevent the people from gaining access to it.

The way in which literal translation is printed under every verse divides the message into unconnected pieces and makes it incoherent. This disturbs the rapturous communion and interrupts the free flow of ideas pulsating with life.

Another reason which contributes to the lack of effectiveness of literal translations is the fact that the Quranic expression is essentially oral rather than written. Every chapter and verse was revealed to the holy Prophet at certain moments during his struggle and was delivered by him as an oration to the people. That is why the tenses change suddenly, the mode of speech alternates between the direct and the indirect, and the Prophet speaks now to an individual and now to a group, now to those present and now to humanity at large.

Every verse has an atmosphere of its own, which sustains communication, and when the Prophet speaks as the representative of a power beyond him that power expresses itself through the medium of the Prophet. If the Quran is isolated from the historical context in which different chapters were revealed, its message would sound repetitious and, at times, incongruous. A literal translation complicates these problems further.

Finally, the Quran uses words not always according to their strict dictionary meaning. It is the contemporary use of words in society at the time and their associations which determine their exact connotation. Take for instance the word, *kufr*. It conveys different meanings at different places. It means a state of total disbelief at one place and denial at another. It is used also to signify ingratitude, lack of recognition or failure to comply with some injunction. At times it expresses faith unaccompanied by action and at times formal compliance without conviction. In literal translation the word will always be *kufr* leaving it to the reader to determine its correct significance and implications.

In Tafheemul Quran an effort has been made to remove the difficulties and defects one usually comes across in a literal translation. Each verse has been interpreted within the environment

of the text, without subservience to words, concentrating all the time on the essential point of the message.

A brief background of each chapter of the Quran is given in the beginning to indicate the approximate period of revelation and its relevance to the stage through which the Islamic movement was passing. The problems which faced the Prophet at the time are also briefly mentioned. No unnecessary issue is raised lest it should divert the attention of the reader from the Quran. Explanatory notes are given to suggest answers to likely questions which may arise in the reader's mind or to hold the reader's attention so that he does not pass over a particular verse without fully comprehending its full meaning and significance.

2

The Muqaddemah of Tafheemul Quran

SECTION I

The Theme and the Arrangement of the Quran

WE are used to reading books which follow a classical pattern. They have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and they contain information, ideas and arguments on specific subjects developed in a conventional fashion. It is not unnatural for us to expect, when we read the Quran, that every subject will be clearly stated and systematically analysed. Similarly we want to find relevant orders and injunctions on different aspects of life and conduct arranged in a precise form in separate sections.

The Quran presents an arrangement which is completely contrary to our expectations. We find beliefs, precepts, orders, criticism, warnings, promises, arguments, evidence, historical illustrations and references to natural phenomena following in rapid succession without any apparent regard for logic. A problem is discussed again and again in different words and in different ways. Subject after subject is taken up only to be abandoned in the middle of the argument. Not only the audience but the speaker also changes from time to time and the mode of address takes a different turn on each occasion. One rarely gets an indication where one subject concludes and another begins.

We find history narrated in a style different from the one followed in text books of history. Problems of philosophy and metaphysics are touched upon in a language which is not the language of logic or ethics. Man and the universe are described in a manner unknown to students of natural sciences. No books of sociology,

law or jurisprudence discuss political, social and economic problems as they are presented in the Quran. We begin to get the impression that it is some desultory piece of work consisting of notes of varying sizes arranged in a running order without any cohesion or coherence. It is on this assumption that the critics of the Quran base most of their objections and create all kinds of doubts. The believers try to get over these nagging doubts, either by rigidly insisting on the literal meanings or by offering far-fetched rationalizations to justify the apparent lack of a recognizable system in the Book. They look anxiously for links to connect different verses even though this might lead them to absurd results. They do not hesitate to isolate a verse from its context and invest it with meanings contrary to what they set out to prove.

What kind of a book, then, is the Quran? How was it revealed? In what order were different chapters conveyed? What is its central theme and the purpose of all the discussion which one finds in the Quran? An answer to these questions should help the reader to get rid of some of his preconceived notions. Let us first understand one thing: the Quran is not a book written on the subject of religion. Nor does it conform to the conventional pattern of text books on learned subjects. It is a Book of its own kind.

Whether one is a believer or not, as a rational person one must read this Book by taking into account the fundamental assumptions made in the Book itself, and by the Prophet who presented it to the world. These assumptions are :—

(*i*) The Creator of the universe established man on this earth as His vicegerent. He granted him the power to know, to think and to understand; to distinguish between good and evil and to exercise his judgement. Man was thus granted the faculty to discriminate and the freedom to choose for himself.

(*ii*) Man's abode on earth is for a fixed tenure—essentially a period of trial—after which he must return to his Creator, when his conduct will be finally evaluated and his salvation will depend on this evaluation. He is shown the right

path and given the option to follow that path which will lead him to contentment on earth and eternal bliss in paradise. But he is equally free to adopt other ways which will cause him suffering and distress on earth and affliction in hell. Man is clearly given to understand that he is subservient to none but God, the lord and master, and to Him alone must he submit in total obedience and worship.

(*iii*) Man was created not in the darkness of ignorance but in the light of knowledge. He was given the intimation of reality and the code of life and he surrendered himself to the will of God. This message was conveyed to successive generations, instructing them to adopt submission to God (which is what the word "Islam" means) as their mode of life. With the passage of time man deviated from the right course and took to misleading paths. He not only lost his way but also distorted knowledge to suit his designs. He visualized the act of creation as a divisible act and set up various animate, inanimate, imaginary and corporeal entities as co-sharers with the Creator. He introduced a variety of superstitions, legends and theories into the knowledge of reality with which he was originally blessed and produced different types of beliefs and religions. The fundamental principles of civilization and justice were thus burdened by personal prejudices and desires and unjust laws were introduced which disturbed the balance and encouraged transgression.

(*iv*) God could compel man to return to the right path but that would not be compatible with the freedom granted to him to choose for himself. God could punish and, indeed, eliminate the whole of mankind for its transgressions but that would go against the concept of man's continuing struggle for good. A tenure on earth having been fixed it was essential that man should receive guidance and for this purpose God chose individuals gifted with the capacity to submit to His will, and appointed them as His messengers.

He blessed them with the knowledge of truth and of the right code of life and they were ordained to invite all men to the right path from which they had strayed.

(*v*) The messengers appeared in different lands and among different nations and the process continued for thousands of years. They all advocated one religion based on the unity of God and accountability on the Day of Judgement and subscribed to one way of life—the right way which was shown to man on the first day. They all received guidance from the same source and followed the same moral principles originally established for man. And they had the same mission, namely, to summon people to the right path and to lead them to the right source of guidance. Their purpose was to organise those who responded to their call into a community which should follow divine guidance, actively upholding and propagating the divine order and frustrating all attempts at its violation or suppression. The messengers carried out their mission faithfully but there were always people who refused to respond to them and even those who did come into their fold succumbed to alien influences. While many lost sight of divine guidance there were others who tampered with divine commandments and misled the people by their ill-conceived interpolations and interpretations.

(*vi*) This process came to a culmination with the designation of Muhammad (peace be upon him) of Arabia for this mission. His audience was the common man including those followers of earlier prophets who had taken to evil ways. His task was to invite them to the right path and to build them into a community which should not only organise its own way of life in accordance with the divine order but also establish that order for the whole world. The Quran spells out the message which was revealed to Muhammad and which represents the permanent and ultimate source of guidance for mankind.

With this background it should be possible to understand the central theme of the Quran. Man is the subject of the Quran. A number of theories about God, the system of the universe, human existence and reality have been formulated by man based on a superficial understanding of objective reality, depending on sensory experiences and speculation. As a result certain attitudes and modes of living have been adopted with disastrous results. Reality is what was conveyed to man when he was designated as God's vicegerent. This is the theme which runs through the Quran. The purpose of the Quran is to invite man to the right course of conduct and to re-awaken in him the instinctive knowledge of divine instructions.

If we keep three things in mind—the main subject, the central theme, and the purpose of the Quran—we will find that the entire Book possesses unique coherence and unity and from the beginning to the end discussion on different topics proceeds in a perfect manner. The Quran talks of the origin of man, the structure of the earth and the heavens, manifestations of the universe and civilizations. It recalls the beliefs and criticizes the conduct of different nations, analyses metaphysical problems and refers to many other things. The object, however, is not to give lessons in metaphysics, philosophy, history or any other science but to remove misunderstandings about reality, to convey true knowledge to man, to acquaint him with the results of actions which conflict with the principles underlying reality and to invite him to a course of action which conforms to truth and leads man to contentment and bliss. A topic is taken up and discussed to the extent it is relevant to the central theme. Once the object is served all other details are ignored. The discourse is related always to the course of the Prophet's mission.

Section II

Background to the Meccan and the Medinite Chapters

How was the Quran revealed? The Quran was not handed over by God as a complete manuscript to the Prophet for publica-

tion. Nor was it presented as a conventional book dealing with some learned subject. It does not follow any known pattern adopted by creative writers. The fact of the matter is that God chose one of His men in Mecca in Arabia and ordained him to give the message first to his own tribe, the Quraish. He was given necessary instructions for this purpose and in the first phase of his mission these instructions had three objectives :

(*i*) To help the Prophet to prepare himself for his assignment and to develop his method of work.

(*ii*) To provide initial intimations of reality and to remove the prevailing doubts and misunderstandings which had led the masses astray.

(*iii*) To offer an invitation to the right way and to state those fundamental moral principles of divine guidance which lead to happiness and salvation.

The revelations in the first phase of the mission consisted of little hymns, expressed in an extremely elegant and melodious style. The diction is in the highest literary tradition and reflects the taste of the people for whom they were meant. These hymns went straight to the heart of the listeners. Those who heard them responded instantaneously and recited them over and over again, compelled by their rhythmic quality. They had a great deal of local colour even though the subject-matter often embraced universal truths. The arguments, illustrations and examples were all taken from the cultural environment with which the audience was familiar. Everything was directly linked with their history, their conventions and their daily experiences and the whole discourse related to the state of their beliefs and their moral and social problems.

The first phase of the mission continued for five years and the reaction to the Prophet's message took three forms :

(*a*) A few people responded to the invitation and joined the Muslim community.

(*b*) A large majority decided to oppose the Prophet. They were determined to protect the vested interests and to preserve the traditional ways.

(*c*) The Prophet's call began to reach a relatively wider circle beyond Mecca and the limits of the Quraish.

Then began the second phase of the mission which continued for nine years. During this phase the confrontation between the revolutionary Islamic movement and the defenders of the status quo assumed a violent form. Not only the people of Mecca or those who belonged to the Quraish tribe but also the supporters of the old order in most parts of Arabia united to frustrate the revolution by force. A bitter and relentless campaign of vilification was unleashed and all kinds of wild objections, morbid allegations and sinister accusations were levelled against the Prophet and his followers creating doubts in the minds of the people. All this had one purpose: to prevent the masses from listening to the Prophet. All means were employed to suppress man's most cherished right——the right to express himself freely. Those who accepted the new faith were subjected to barbaric persecution. They were isolated as social outcasts and cultural pariahs and on two occasions many of them were compelled to abandon their homes and migrate to Abyssinia. On the third occasion they all migrated to Medina. But the movement continued to spread despite intense and growing resistance. What contributed bitterness and hatred to the situation was the fact that the new movement cut across every Quraish family. Brothers and sisters, sons and fathers, daughters and mothers found themselves arrayed on opposite sides. The devotees of Islam had to confront their own friends and relatives. A new crisis developed when the old order was abandoned by some of the people occupying positions of influence and eminence. The new faith helped them to develop great qualities of character and righteousness and quite naturally their example attracted many others to Islam.

During this long and intense struggle God revealed to His Prophet, according to the needs and requirements of each occasion, sermons of tremendous power and majesty which created a new collective consciousness among the believers and made them profoundly aware of their fundamental duties. They were instructed to be righteous, to build their character and to cultivate excellence

of moral conduct. And they were inspired to take up the propagation of the message of Islam, in which they were promised success and high spiritual rewards. They developed fortitude and courage in pursuing the cause of Islam and willingness to undergo suffering and to offer every sacrifice.

These revealed sermons served as a warning to those who had slumped into a degenerate state. They were asked to look at the ruins of old civilizations. Mounds of rubble which they passed by on their journeys reminded them constantly of the habitations which had come to a dismal end. All around them on land and under the skies were clear signs of the unity of God and of the reality of the hereafter. They could see and understand the ignoble consequences which had caught up with those who had insisted on pursuing the old perverted ways, denying the unity of God and the concept of accountability.

Whatever doubts cropped up in the minds of the listeners were removed. Every objection was explained and answered and the mental confusion in which they were involved, or in which they were trying to involve the others, was resolved. Ignorance and superstition were forced to yield place to knowledge and reason. The people were reminded that, like the preceding generations, if they persisted in sowing the wind, they must be ready to reap the whirlwind. There was no way for man to escape the consequences of his actions. Evil must produce evil and a full account must be rendered on the appointed day.

It is in this context that man was reminded of the wrath of God and the horrors of hell. Those who oppressed the believers were condemned for their unwillingness to see the truth, their blind subservience to superstition and their complete lack of morality. Various civilizations rose to great heights by following certain fundamental principles of culture and morality. These principles were explained to the people, so that they too might organise their lives according to them.

This phase comprised a number of stages and the scope of the mission expanded as the movement advanced. The resistance of

the opponents continued to grow and the believers came into conflict with various groups professing different beliefs, and that is why the contents of these sermons reflected great variety.

This briefly is the background to those chapters of the Quran popularly known as the Meccan chapters.

After the mission had completed thirteen years in Mecca its centre shifted to Medina and it became possible for the Prophet to collect his followers from different parts of Arabia and to consolidate his position. This coincided with the migration of the Prophet and a majority of the Muslims to Medina. With this the mission entered its third phase.

The situation changed completely during this phase. The Muslim community was able to establish a proper State and armed encounters commenced with the custodians of vested interests. The Muslims also had to contend with the Jews and the Christians who professed to follow former prophets. Within the Muslim community itself there were different kinds of hypocrites whose conduct had to be watched. After ten years of continuous and intense struggle the movement spread to the whole of Arabia and the prospects of its extension to other parts of the world became visible. There were different stages during this phase too and at each stage the movement faced special problems and requirements. It was to meet these requirements that God revealed to the Prophet His message, now in the nature of forceful declamations and exhortations and now as a series of orders and injunctions.

It was during this phase that the community was guided to evolve its culture and to establish its government. Principles and regulations were laid down to govern the activities of the community in different walks of life. How should the hypocrites among the believers be dealt with? What relations should the community have with the unbelievers living under State protection? What should be the nature of co-existence with the followers of other revealed religions and what should be the norm of behaviour with enemies at war and with hostile powers? The purpose was to prepare the believers to discharge the trust reposed in them in their capacity as

vicegerent of the Lord of the universe. In these sermons the Muslims were warned of their weaknesses and instructed how to conduct themselves in victory and defeat, joy and anguish, prosperity and adversity, happiness and fear. They were inspired to sacrifice their lives and property in the way of God. They were told that they had to be ready to carry on the message of the Prophet after him. Simultaneously, these sermons were intended to persuade the non-believers and the hypocrites to return to the right way and this persuasion was couched generally in mild tones but sometime in tones of admonition, so that they should take a lesson from what had befallen those who had preceded them on the path of evil and realise what was in store for them if they persisted in deyfing universal moral principles.

This briefly is the background of those chapters of the Quran known as Medinite chapters.

SECTION III

The Quran Presents an Integrated Picture of Life

The revelation of the Quran was spread over a period of twenty-three years and was related to the requirements of different stages through which the Islamic movement passed. The arrangement of the Quran, therefore, does not correspond to a university thesis. Again, different sections and chapters, of varying length, revealed during the course of the movement, were not printed and distributed as pamphlets but were delivered as sermons and continued to be propagated as such. Inevitably, they had the directness and appeal of the spoken word. The style was not that of a class-room lecture but of an open invitation intended to evoke a response from the heart as well as the mind.

One who undertakes to propagate an idea and sets out to convince people of different intellectual levels of its validity has to deal with situations of all kinds during his struggle. He must be prepared to present his idea from different angles and in different ways if his object is to bring about a fundamental change in the pre-

vailing scheme of values, to overcome resistance, and to inspire those who respond to his call to live up to that idea and to adopt it as a part of their life, so that those who do not agree may begin to see its significance and its practical force and their hostility may be gradually eliminated. In brief, he has to do all that is required of a pioneer and leader of a movement.

This explains why there appears to be so much repetition of subjects in the Quran. In any movement directed to bring about sociological change it is vital to formulate and state matters connected with a particular stage and so long as the movement remains at that stage, to continue to explain and project those matters even though it might take months or years. But it is not possible to go on stating a problem in the same words over and over again, however relevant or important the problem may be. It has to be expressed and analysed in a different way each time so that with successive presentations the problem should become more acceptable and comprehensible. This process goes on till the position is consolidated at each stage. But apart from matters connected with different aspects of the movement there are those fundamental beliefs and principles which are basic to the whole struggle and these must not be relegated to the background at any time. To illustrate, one sees that parts of certain chapters of the Quran revealed at a particular time, deal with subjects of the same kind but there is continuous re-affirmation of some of the principles throughout the Quran, such as the unity of God, His attributes, accountability in the hereafter, Prophethood, faith in the Book, clarity of mind, endurance and trust.

The process of revelation coincided with the beginning of the Islamic movement. The sequence in which different chapters were revealed had a purpose which was fulfilled when the movement reached its culmination. The final arrangement was determined by a different requirement and in this sense the revelation itself dictated the order in which it was to be preserved. This is not difficult to understand. The movement began with the need to educate the people right from the beginning and elementary principles

had to be explained before dealing with more complex and profound concepts. Once the people to whom the message was conveyed had accepted it as their faith it became their responsibility to carry on the message conveyed to them by the Prophet complete in theory and practice. The community (Ummah) had to acquaint itself fully with its duties and responsibilities and with the code of life which was offered to the world in its final form. The present arrangement of the Quran fully meets this requirement and has a lasting relevance for mankind.

Once you go through the Quran you will see that if all the chapters dealing with the same topic were to be grouped together and arranged subject-wise, it would be wholly inconsistent with the spirit of the Book. The Quran reflects a totality of vision and a comprehensiveness which presents an integrated picture of life. Matters which came up during the Medina period are recalled in the Meccan days and Meccan subjects are illustrated in Medina sermons; preliminary discussions are referred to in the final injunctions, and many of the teachings of the early period are recalled in the later revelations. All this helps to build up a complete vision projected at all levels and in all directions rather than a fragmentary and compartmentalized image of life.

Had the Quran been arranged according to the sequence in which each chapter was revealed it would have become necessary to put in a supplement explaining the background of different chapters. This would have been incongruous with the original purpose of compiling and preserving only the actual revelations. The purpose was to keep the Quran, without addition or amendment, in a form which should be available to all people at all places and at all times. Men and women, young and old, laymen and scholars, country folk and city dwellers should alike be able to read it and understand what they should pursue and what they should avoid for their own happiness and salvation. Those who object to the present arrangement assume that the Book was intended exclusively for students of history or political science.

Let it be remembered that the present arrangement of the

Quran was adopted by the Prophet himself under divine guidance and not by his succesors. Whenever a chapter was revealed the Prophet would call one of the scribes and dictate it to him, after which the scribe would be told exactly where the chapter should be placed. If any part of the revelation was not to be inscribed as a complete chapter the Prophet would indicate the exact position to be assigned to it in one of the earlier chapters. The Prophet himself followed this order while reciting different verses during the prayers or on other occasions and this was the order which was followed by the companions of the Prophet.

It is an established historical fact that the arrangement of the Quran was completed on the day the revelation was completed. The arrangement was determined by the One who revealed the Quran and preserved by the one to whom it was revealed. No one else could interfere with that arrangement.

SECTION IV

The Quran Represents an Invitation and a Movement

The scribes would record different chapters of the Quran on palm leaves, the bark of trees or on bones, but there were others among the companions of the Prophet who would commit them to memory. Though the Quran was recorded and preserved in this fashion it was not compiled in the form of a book during the life of the Prophet.

After the death of the Prophet there was a sudden wave of apostasy in Arabia and a number of the companions of the Prophet who knew the Quran by heart lost their lives in battles against the apostates. It was at the suggestion of Hazrat Omar that Hazrat Abu Bakr, after some hesitation, agreed to have the Quran compiled in one volume. He appointed Zain bin Thabit Ansari, who was the Prophet's scribe, to collect all the written portions left behind by the Prophet and to obtain such copies of different chapters of the Quran as were available with the companions. Those who knew the Quran by heart were consulted and after careful verification and agreement of all these three sources, an authentic and complete

version of the Quran was produced. The final copy was entrusted to Hazrat Hafza (Hazrat Omar's daughter, and wife of the holy Prophet). People were permitted to make copies of it or to compare their own record with it.

All variations which had crept into the Quran due to differences of dialect, which did not affect the meaning, were eliminated. This was necessary to avoid any possible misunderstanding in the future, particularly as the Arabic language itself was getting influenced by other languages of regions beyond the deserts of Arabia which were coming into the fold of Islam. Any verbal or linguistic difference would have led to controversy and dispute which may have affected the original language of the Quran. Hazrat Usman despatched copies of the authentic version of the Quran to all Muslim territories and the publication of any version containing any other idiom or dialect was forbidden.

People turn to the Quran with different objects in view. For those who wish to know in what manner the Book provides guidance to man in dealing with the problems of life, the following suggestions may be of help.

If you start reading the Book with pre-conceived notions and prejudices the spirit of the Quran will elude you. A single reading may be enough for a superficial acquaintance but to grasp its real sense you will have to go through it more than once. It is only then that the complete scheme of thought which the Book offers may begin to unfold itself to you.

At first you should concentrate on the fundamental concepts of the Book and try to see how a whole system of life is built on those concepts. Many questions will arise in your mind. Make a note of them. It is possible that you may find an adequate answer on second or third reading. The effort should be to identify and distinguish those acts or facets of human conduct which would contribute to man's happiness or lead to frustration and ruin. This exercise can be extended to beliefs, moral precepts, rights, duties, laws, politics, culture, war and peace.

The injunctions of the Quran in relation to different fields of human activity will help you to fit them into a complete pattern of

life. Those who wish to carry out detailed research on any specific subject should first make a study of relevant available literature and then try to understand the Quranic view of that subject. They will often get a new light from a Quranic verse which they may have read several times without really understanding its full meaning.

All these are suggestions which are intended to help you to study the Quran properly. But reading is not enough if you wish to identify yourself with the spirit of the Quran. For the Quran is not a book of abstract theories. It does not set out to resolve metaphysical controversies or academic complexities. It is a Book which contains an invitation and represents a movement. The moment it began to be revealed, a man who was leading a quiet and pious existence was impelled to abandon the comfort of his private life and confront the whole world. He challenged all those who opposed the truth and found himself locked in a bitter struggle with the lords of ignorance, disbelief and evil. He began to draw believers from every home and gathered them under the banner of truth. The whole of Arabia erupted with anger but the believers carried on their mission relentlessly. The voice of a single individual started a movement and for twenty-three years the Book provided guidance to this glorious movement from the beginning till the establishment of the Khilafat.

At every stage during this struggle between good and evil the Quran provided the Prophet with inspiration and knowledge and strength. Is it possible to understand the mysteries of the Quran without ever stepping into the battlefield of good and evil? One can understand the Book only when one begins to act upon it and when every step that one takes is guided by the injunctions that are contained in the Quran. Once you decide to do this you will go through all the experiences which occurred during the course of the revelation. You will pass through Mecca, Habash and Taif and experience the ups and downs from Badr and Uhad to Honain and Tobuk. You will encounter Abu Jehl and Abu Lahb and the hypocrites. You will learn how to deal with men of all kinds and begin to realize how to conduct yourself.

You will obtain a new kind of guidance—the Quranic guidance. Every chapter and verse will reveal its full message to you and you will understand at what juncture during the original movement they were revealed and what purpose they served. You might miss some grammatical or linguistic subtlety but it is not possible that you will not be exposed to the Quran in its full light and glory. Some objections which are often raised need to be answered.

(1) How is it that a Book which was meant for the whole of mankind was addressed to the Arabs and most of the references which it contains deal only with the history, culture and environment of the Arabs? A careful reading of the Quran will show that references to history and culture serve only to illustrate a point, the point itself is always of universal relevance. When disbelief is attacked several instances from contemporary Arab history are cited but the fundamental lesson applies to the nature and consequences of disbelief throughout the world. A whole philosophy of life could not have been presented in abstract terms alone. The invitation was extended first to the people of a certain area and after those people had modelled their lives in accordance with the message of the Prophet it became possible for them to extend their influence to other areas. Since the Islamic movement was essentially based on the equality of man, it had universal application and local references did not restrict either its appeal or its relevance.

(2) It is commonly believed that the Quran provides detailed instructions concerning every kind of human activity. One is therefore surprised to see that even in such vital matters as prayers and Zakaat no particular procedure has been prescribed. One tends to forget that along with the Book, God designated a Prophet to guide and develop the Islamic community. The Quran is a Book of principles and not of details. Its purpose is to state and advocate, through reason and persuasion, the intellectual and moral basis of the Islamic way of life. The life of the Prophet provided a practical interpretation and a complete demonstration of the Quranic principles.

(3) The Quran repeatedly condemns those who promote

differences and disputes. How is it then that there are such widespread differences among the Muslims about the meanings of the Quranic injunctions? This is a difficult problem which has many implications but for the general reader of the Quran it should be enough to know that the Quran is not opposed to dissent based on honest research into the meanings of Quranic laws and injunctions within an agreed framework of Islamic order. The Quran condemns the tendency to create differences and disputes out of selfishness, confusion or divisive motives. While honest differences of opinion are the essence of life and progress and must exist in all societies where people have the freedom of thought and expression, all divisive controversies destroy social cohesion and disrupt progress. If the fundamentals are known and accepted any two scholars may disagree about the interpretation of words in that context. Neither of them need be excommunicated merely because he holds a different view. Both should be free to present arguments in support of their interpretation and depending on the nature of the problem the decision should be left to the people or to the highest court of justice. But where there is a dispute about the fundamentals or where a subsidiary problem is converted into a basic problem, and anyone disagreeing with it is threatened with excommunication, then it is not free expression but regimentation which divides the people and this regimentation is condemned by the Quran. There are several instances of differences of opinion occurring even during the life of the holy Prophet and he always upheld the right of dissent.

Dissent sustains the ability of the society to reflect and to discriminate. Without curiosity and research life would be reduced to a purposeless routine. Members of a society must understand the orders which they are called upon to obey and they must be encouraged to find a solution to their problems within the system to which they belong. While there should be agreement on the fundamentals to preserve cohesion, men of intellect and scholarship must have the freedom and the initiative to determine all questions of interpretation and application for themselves within reasonable limits.

Part TWO

3

Al-Fatihah: A Charter of Human Liberty

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ
اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ رَبِّ الْعٰلَمِيْنَ ۙ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ ۙ مٰلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّيْنِ ۙ
اِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَاِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِيْنُ ۙ اِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيْمَ ۙ
صِرَاطَ الَّذِيْنَ اَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ ۙ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوْبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّآلِّيْنَ ۙ
(الفاتحة)

A LONELY wanderer in the darkness of night sees a sudden light—a flicker which develops into a radiant beam as he advances toward it. This is how the mind groping for expression discovers the right word. It is not just an intellectual exercise but an effort in which the whole being of man is involved; his instincts, reason, emotions, hopes and fears keep striking against his mind till the spark is produced.

This spark sometimes turns into a miraculous ray of light which illumines some dark corner of reality. The poet gets his word and it is inspiration. The Prophet his vision, under Divine guidance, and it is revelation. The difference is that the Prophet's expression, unlike the poet's, is not merely appropriate or original, it bears an indelible seal of perfection.

Al-Fatihah, the opening chapter of the Quran, represents man's discovery of perfect expression in a moment of awareness of reality. Commentators have referred to it as 'the prayer', 'the

essence', and 'the foundation' of the Quran.

وَلَقَدْ اٰتَيْنٰكَ سَبْعًا مِّنَ الْمَثَانِيْ وَالْقُرْاٰنَ الْعَظِيْمَ ○

(الحجر: ٨٧)

"And We have given you the seven oft-repeated verses and the glorious Quran". (15 : 87)

It is generally believed that 'the seven oft-repeated verses' refer to surah Al-Fatihah. Abul Kalam Azad devoted more than two hundred pages of Tarjuman-ul-Quran to explain the meanings of these verses. Here I have adopted some of his comments with gratitude and respect. Let me first attempt a translation of this Surah :

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

"All praise to Allah Who creates and sustains the worlds.
His Grace is unabounding, His Mercy infinite.
Master of the Day of Judgement.
We worship You alone and to You alone we turn for help.
Guide us on the straight path.
The path of those whom You blessed,
not of those who went astray and incurred Your wrath."

According to authentic opinion it is the first complete surah which was revealed to the Prophet during the earliest days of his mission. The introductory note on this surah in Tafheemul Quran contains the following:[1]

This surah is, in fact, a prayer. It is placed in the beginning so that we may recite it to seek help as we begin to study the Quran. We pray for what we want and we address our prayer to the One Who is in a position to grant it. The reader takes up the Quran with the attitude of a person looking for guidance and he prays to God to show him the right path. Surah Al-Fatihah is not an introduction to the Quran. It is

1. (Vol. I, Page 42).

man's prayer to God and the Quran is God's response to that prayer. "God Almighty, guide me", says man. "Here is the Book of truth for your guidance", answers God.

The divine attributes of mercy and compassion are extolled in the introductory verse.

The first verse appeals to God, to Whom all praise is due, as the God of the universe, not of any particular race, or nation. He creates and nourishes the worlds and ensures their development to a state of perfection according to laws directed to serve a divine purpose and in a universal framework which is characterized by balance, moderation, tolerance, beauty and charity.

The second verse mentions the two attributes which sustain all that is created by God——grace and mercy, both infinite and inexhaustible. These attributes save man from the continuing effects of his lapses and transgressions and maintain the balance in favour of good.

In the third verse, we come to the point of final judgement on man's conduct. You get what you earn. This establishes the principle of accountability.

Here I should introduce briefly the Quranic view of good and evil. Good is not dependent on form or ritual.

لَيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَ
لٰكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللّٰهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ وَالْكِتٰبِ وَ
النَّبِيّٖنَ ۚ وَآتَى الْمَالَ عَلٰى حُبِّهٖ ذَوِي الْقُرْبٰى وَالْيَتٰمٰى وَ
الْمَسٰكِيْنَ وَابْنَ السَّبِيْلِ ۙ وَالسَّآئِلِيْنَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ ۚ وَأَقَامَ
الصَّلٰوةَ وَآتَى الزَّكٰوةَ ۚ وَالْمُوْفُوْنَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عٰهَدُوْا ۚ وَ
الصّٰبِرِيْنَ فِي الْبَأْسَآءِ وَالضَّرَّآءِ وَحِيْنَ الْبَأْسِ ۗ أُولٰٓئِكَ الَّذِيْنَ
صَدَقُوْا ۖ وَأُولٰٓئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُوْنَ ۝ (البقرة ، ١٧٧)

"Virtue does not mean turning your face eastward or westward in the prayer.

It means belief in God, in the hereafter, in the angels, in
the prophets of God, and in divine revelations.
It requires looking after poor relations, helping the needy,
the indigent, the way-farer and the orphan
and setting slaves at liberty for the love of God.
Be earnest in the prayer and offer regular charity.
Those who honour their word, remain patient in distress
and steadfast in their struggle against evil
are truly faithful and virtuous." (2 : 177)

Evil takes many forms but it always contains some element of transgression, excess, waste, mis-application or disorder and implies deliberate pursuit of these ends.

The struggle between good and evil is decided according to the law of requital, which is subordinate to the divine purpose that good must ultimately outweigh evil and falsehood must yield place to truth. Without this not only would the essential balance be disturbed, the whole object of creation would be frustrated. The law of requital is in operation all the time but the final determination awaits the Day of Judgement when God as judge and master will 'decide the issue'. The concept of the hereafter is inseparable from the process of evolution. It is arbitrary to assume that this process which governs growth and decay, selection and survival, generation and regeneration at different levels of existence should come to an abrupt and final end in physical death.

The fourth verse is a charter of human liberty and dignity. Man enters into a covenant with God, which excludes all intermediaries, helpers and other masters. He breaks off all bonds of subservience at one stroke and proclaims that to God alone will he bow in obedience and to Him alone will he turn for help. I remember vividly the moment when I first realized the significance of this verse. 'We worship You alone, and to You alone we turn for help.' It was a dramatic moment of freedom, a moment in which fear disappeared and within me I felt a resurgence of confidence and faith.

Hegel rejected an objective God on the ground that such a

presence stimulated fear, cowardice and selfishness. He described the relation between an existent God and man on the basis of his master-slave doctrine. If we assume that divine existence must always encourage slavish sentiments how would we explain the fact that belief in God has so often inspired man to rise to great heights of independence, fortitude and courage? A direct God-man covenant liberates man and relieves him of all those considerations which would compel him to enter into a chain of master-slave relationships with other men. The God-man covenant is thus a covenant of freedom, which supersedes all other relations and covenants. This, in essence, is the message of this verse.

This surah is divided into two movements, the first of which culminates in the third verse followed by an affirmation of relationship in the fourth, bringing man into direct communion with God, and in the last three verses man makes his choice in favour of good.

He beseeches God for guidance in the fifth verse. Man has his instincts, his senses, and his reason to help him, but exposed as he is to temptation and fear he seeks divine revelation for his guidance and protection.

In the last two verses man places himself in the mirrors of time, sees what would happen to him if he is led astray and prays devoutly that he may be guided on the right path, the path of those who are blessed.

What is the right path? Abdullah Bin Masud (R.A.) reports :

> "The Prophet drew a straight line with his finger and said, 'Let us say this is the path of God.' He then drew on either side of it a number of lines at different angles. 'These are the other ways and behind each one of these is a demon beckoning the unwary', observed the Prophet (may peace be upon him)".

4

Surah Baqarah : The Original Path

وَقَالُوْا كُوْنُوْا هُوْدًا اَوْ نَصٰرٰى تَهْتَدُوْا ۭ قُلْ بَلْ مِلَّةَ اِبْرٰهٖمَ حَنِيْفًا ۭ
وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِيْنَ ۝ قُوْلُوْٓا اٰمَنَّا بِاللّٰهِ وَمَآ اُنْزِلَ اِلَيْنَا وَمَآ اُنْزِلَ
اِلٰٓى اِبْرٰهٖمَ وَاِسْمٰعِيْلَ وَاِسْحٰقَ وَيَعْقُوْبَ وَالْاَسْبَاطِ وَمَآ اُوْتِيَ مُوْسٰى
وَعِيْسٰى وَمَآ اُوْتِيَ النَّبِيُّوْنَ مِنْ رَّبِّهِمْ ۚ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ اَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ ۡ وَنَحْنُ
لَهٗ مُسْلِمُوْنَ ۝

(البقرة : ١٣٥، ١٣٦)

"The Jews claim that salvation is only for the Jews.
The Christians say the right path is the Christian path.
Ask them, O, Prophet, "Why not the original path,
the path of Ibrahim?"
He was a man of faith and not an idolator.
Proclaim, O Muslims : We believe in God.
And in the divine revelation conveyed to us
and in what was revealed to Ibrahim, Ismail, Ishaq,
Yaqub and the progeny of Yaqub.
We believe in what was revealed to Moosa and Isa and to
all the other prophets.
We make no invidious distinction between them.
We are the believers in God." (2 : 135-136)

THESE verses bring out the spirit of the message of Islam, its insistence on the original source of guidance, the unity of divine revelations, and the emphasis on tolerance and accommodation. They also explain Islam's relationship with other prophets and religions. The Muslims believe in all that was revealed by God to all the prophets of the world and make no distinction among

them. The Quran guides the people to the original path of Ibrahim, which was abandoned by the succeeding generations.

The titles of various chapters of the Quran are convenient titles which do not necessarily describe the contents. This Surah is called Al-Baqarah as there is a reference to cow worship in verses 52 and 65 but the chapter covers a number of topics each one of such considerable scope that no single heading could possibly describe them. The Prophet assigned names to different chapters of the Quran under divine guidance.

The major portion of this chapter was revealed in Medina during the period immediately following the Hijra though it contains some verses of a later period. The concluding verses are known to have been revealed in Mecca prior to the Hijra but they too are included in this chapter because of their obvious relevance to the subject.

In Mecca, prior to the Hijra, the Prophet was dealing with non-believers for whom the message of Islam was both novel and unfamiliar. After Hijra the Muslims came in contact with the Jews who had their settlements adjacent to Medina. The Jews were not non-believers. They acknowledged the unity of God, believed in prophethood and divine revelation and accepted the existence of angels and the hereafter. They subscribed to the divine code which was revealed to Moosa. In essentials their religion was not different from the one preached by the Prophet of Islam. Unfortunately, they had lost contact with their original message as a result of continuous deviations over a long period.

Their life was dominated by rituals and customs alien to the spirit of their religion and a number of elements which had no sanction in Torah had crept into their beliefs. They had introduced their own words and passages into the revealed text, and because of these interpolations the original version had become distorted.

They continued to cling to the form, though the spirit had long disappeared. As happens in a state of decadence, any suggestion of change or reformation was rejected by the Jewish scholars and leaders as heresy and anyone who criticised and

exposed their practices was branded as an enemy.

The Jewish leaders combined to frustrate the mission of the Prophet of Islam which they regarded as a direct threat to their influence and position. They forgot that they had started as Muslims but gradually degenerated into an arrogant racial group having turned what was a universal religion into a preserve of the Israeli race. Their whole life was full of deviationist and divisive tendencies, intellectual hair-splitting, pursuit of form and neglect of content, loss of faith and love of materialism.

When the Prophet arrived in Medina he invited the Jews to the original path of truth. The first sixteen sections of this chapter deal with the history of the Jews. Their prevailing conditions and practices are judged in the light of the guidance which they had originally received.

It is shown that when a community abandons itself to ceremonies and rituals and alienates itself from the real purpose of life its downfall is inevitable. The fundamental principles of the code of truth are formulated in this chapter of the Quran and that which is significant is emphasised.

Another problem which the Prophet had to deal with in Medina was that of organising the new community of believers. In Mecca his mission was limited to the propagation of the divine message. But as different Arab tribes who had accepted Islam started to converge on Medina, a miniature Islamic State came into existence with the help of the Ansars. Injunctions relating to social, cultural, economic, political and legal matters were revealed to the Prophet and the foundations were laid on which the structure of the new state reflecting the right way of life was to be raised. The latter part of this chapter contains these instructions, most of which were revealed in the beginning of the Medinite period and the others on appropriate subsequent occasions.

The small community which was established in Medina found itself surrounded on all sides by hostile elements determined to wipe it out. Before the Hijra, the believers stayed wherever they happened to be residing notwithstanding the dangers and the

persecution to which they were exposed, and the Prophet continued to propagate his message among the non-believers in the citadel of their strength. But now the community was concentrated in one place and its survival depended on strengthening its position and enlarging its area of influence. This could be done only through a vigorous and positive propagation of its point of view and forthright exposure of the contradictions and inconsistencies of its opponents. The atmosphere was one of insecurity and there was imminent danger of attack from all sides. The believers had to be inspired with hope and conviction to face the aggressive designs of the enemy, regardless of all the odds and the obvious inequality of resources. They had also to understand that if reasoning and persuasion failed, the old corrupt order would have to be changed by force. All these aspects are touched upon in this chapter.

Another subject which finds place in this chapter relates to the hypocrites. Apart from the believers and the non-believers, another class was beginning to emerge. There were, of course, people in Mecca who believed in Islam but were not prepared to face any hardship or to make any sacrifice for their faith. But the hypocrites of Medina were of a different breed. They were outright disbelievers who made a pretence of believing to get into the ranks of the Muslims in order to create disruption. There were others who tried to play it safe by cahooting with both sides avoiding all risks but getting whatever benefit they could from either side. But there were some who were genuinely in doubt. They did whatever the other members of their tribe asked them to do. Lastly, there were those who accepted the principles of Islam but found it difficult to abandon their traditional customs and practices. They hesitated to abandon the comforts of the old and to expose themselves to the hazards of the new.

5

A People Most Balanced

وَكَذَٰلِكَ جَعَلْنَٰكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِّتَكُونُوا۟ شُهَدَآءَ عَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ
وَيَكُونَ ٱلرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا ط (البقرة ، ١٤٣)

"This is how We ordained you
to be a people most balanced
so that you may be a model to others
and the Prophet a model to you". (2 : 143)

I HAVE translated the Arabic phrase, '*Ummatan Wasata*', as "a people most balanced." The phrase has been translated by others as "a central community", "a just people", "an exalted people", and "an Umma justly balanced." The authority and responsibility of leadership is entrusted through this verse to the Muslims and this marks the end of the dominance of the Jews.

This verse and the one immediately following bring about a fundamental institutional change, namely, the change of Qibla (the direction to which we turn in the prayer). In the early days the Muslims used to turn towards Jerusalem which was sacred both to the Jews and the Christians. As the Muslims developed their own identity and social and political structure as a community in Medina and began to evolve their distinct code of conduct the Qibla was changed from Jerusalem to Kaaba (in Mecca), the house of God, which Ibrahim built. This linked them with the original symbol of divine guidance. The change occurred in the second

year after Hijra.

قَدْ نَرَىٰ تَقَلُّبَ وَجْهِكَ فِي السَّمَاءِ فَلَنُوَلِّيَنَّكَ قِبْلَةً تَرْضَاهَا
فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنتُمْ فَوَلُّوا
وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ • (البقرة ، ١٤٤)

"We see you turn your face heavenward in supplication and prayer.
Here, We ordain that the Qibla be changed in the direction you desire.
From now on turn to the sacred Mosque while you pray, wherever you may be". (2 : 144)

The Prophet was anxious to have the Kaaba established as a symbol of uniformity of direction and "the centre and gathering ground of all peoples in the universal Pilgrimage, which was instituted with it". The Christians oriented their churches to the east and some Jews turned towards Jerusalem. Once Kaaba was adopted as the Qibla it became a mark of unity for the Muslims all over the world.

وَكَذَٰلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا (البقرة ، ١٤٣)

The words 'this is how', point specifically to the role of leadership assigned to the Muslims and explain how the Prophet helped the believers to develop into 'a people most balanced'. Till this time the leadership was the privilege of Bene Israel. Now this privilege was withdrawn and awarded to the followers of the Prophet.

As indicated above, the words, '*Ummatan Wasata*', have been translated in a variety of ways but no English phrase really conveys their precise and full meaning. A community of people most balanced must acquire the highest moral stature and conduct itself in all circumstances in accordance with the principles of justice, equity, tolerance, and moderation. Only then can a community occupy a central position among other nations of the world and maintain with each one of them fair and proper relations. Com-

menting on this Abdullah Yusuf Ali says: "the essence of Islam is to avoid all extravagances on either side. It is a sober, practical religion. But the Arabic word *Wasat* also implies a touch of the literal meaning of intermediacy. Geographically, Asia is in an intermediate position in the Old World, as was proved in history by the rapid expansion of Islam, north, south, west and east." He then adds that, "the mission of Islam is to curb, for instance, the extreme formalism of the Mosaic Law and the extreme other-worldliness professed by Christianity".

The literal translation of the verse would be, "this is how we made you the central community so that you may be a witness to the people and the Prophet a witness to you". This refers clearly to the Day of Judgement when everyone will be called to account and the Prophet will testify that as a messenger of God he faithfully transmitted all His teachings and injunctions which were revealed to him and invited mankind to adopt a just system and to follow the right way of life. He personally lived according to that way and practised what he preached and his life became a perfect model and an eternal source of guidance and inspiration for men. After the Prophet, his followers will be brought forward and they will be called upon to show that they carried on the mission of the Prophet, conveyed his message to the others, and lived up to his teachings to the best of their ability.

It is this role of leadership which makes man a witness for God in this world. As the Prophet provided perfect evidence of faith, rectitude, courage, justice and truth, so must his followers offer evidence of these qualities for the rest of mankind. There is no contradiction or inconsistency in the life of the Prophet. His followers, too, must ensure by their conduct that their words and deeds bear testimony to their beliefs. The Prophet was designated to communicate the divine message to the people. Had he failed in this, even in the slightest degree, he would have been called upon to account for it. Similarly, we too are under an obligation to carry on the mission of the Prophet, so that we spread his teachings to the people throughout the world.

If we cannot show on the Day of Judgement that we discharged this responsibility with the utmost diligence and conviction, we will have violated the trust reposed in us as members of the exalted central community. So long as we occupy this position of trust, we must take the blame for any injustice and oppression which may be caused anywhere in the world by an instrument of evil. The question will be put to us :

> "What did you do when the forces of tyranny and sin were engaged in the persecution of man?" Each one of us will have to furnish an answer to this question.

6

The Fall of a Nation

يٰبَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ ٱذۡكُرُواْ نِعۡمَتِيَ ٱلَّتِيٓ أَنۡعَمۡتُ عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَأَوۡفُواْ
بِعَهۡدِيٓ أُوفِ بِعَهۡدِكُمۡ وَإِيَّٰيَ فَٱرۡهَبُونِ ○ وَءَامِنُواْ بِمَآ أَنزَلۡتُ
مُصَدِّقٗا لِّمَا مَعَكُمۡ وَلَا تَكُونُوٓاْ أَوَّلَ كَافِرِۭ بِهِۦۖ وَلَا تَشۡتَرُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِي
ثَمَنٗا قَلِيلٗا وَإِيَّٰيَ فَٱتَّقُونِ ○ وَلَا تَلۡبِسُواْ ٱلۡحَقَّ بِٱلۡبَٰطِلِ وَ
تَكۡتُمُواْ ٱلۡحَقَّ وَأَنتُمۡ تَعۡلَمُونَ ○ وَأَقِيمُواْ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتُواْ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ
وَٱرۡكَعُواْ مَعَ ٱلرَّٰكِعِينَ ○ أَتَأۡمُرُونَ ٱلنَّاسَ بِٱلۡبِرِّ وَتَنسَوۡنَ أَنفُسَكُمۡ
وَأَنتُمۡ تَتۡلُونَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَۚ أَفَلَا تَعۡقِلُونَ ○ وَٱسۡتَعِينُواْ بِٱلصَّبۡرِ وَ
ٱلصَّلَوٰةِۚ وَإِنَّهَا لَكَبِيرَةٌ إِلَّا عَلَى ٱلۡخَٰشِعِينَ ○ ٱلَّذِينَ يَظُنُّونَ
أَنَّهُم مُّلَٰقُواْ رَبِّهِمۡ وَأَنَّهُمۡ إِلَيۡهِ رَٰجِعُونَ ○ يَٰبَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ
ٱذۡكُرُواْ نِعۡمَتِيَ ٱلَّتِيٓ أَنۡعَمۡتُ عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَأَنِّي فَضَّلۡتُكُمۡ عَلَى ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ○
وَٱتَّقُواْ يَوۡمٗا لَّا تَجۡزِي نَفۡسٌ عَن نَّفۡسٖ شَيۡـٔٗا وَلَا يُقۡبَلُ مِنۡهَا شَفَٰعَةٞ
وَلَا يُؤۡخَذُ مِنۡهَا عَدۡلٞ وَلَا هُمۡ يُنصَرُونَ ○ (البقرة : ٤٠-٤٨)

"O Children of Israel!
Consider your blessings and abide by the Covenant as I do.
You do not have to fear any one but Me.
You should believe in what is now revealed
for it confirms what you already possess.
Strange, that you should be the first to repudiate it.
Do not barter away divine revelations for a paltry price
Beware of the consequences,
And do not cover truth with falsehood,
suppressing what you know to be right.

Be steadfast in the prayer and offer charity.
And bow down before me along with the others.
How can you guide people to righteousness when you do not practise what you preach
despite your access to the Scriptures?
You really have no sense.
Seek help through prayer and patience.
The prayer is indeed exacting but not for those
who are devout and who believe
that in the end they will meet their
God and to Him they must return.
O Children of Israel!
Remember the favour when you were exalted above all nations.
Beware of the Day when every one will have to account for his deeds,
when neither intercession, nor compensation will avail,
nor shall the guilty receive any help." (2 : 40-48)

THE above verses are the first reference to Israel in surah Al-Baqarah. There follows a closely argued exposition of the rise to eminence of the Israelites and their decline. Various instances from their history are taken up and the case is presented with relentless logic as a warning to other nations. Many readers find repeated references to Bene Israel in the Quran out of date and unrelated to contemporary realities. The truth is that the history of Israel is a perfect example of nations rising to eminence through faith and effort and then degenerating to ignominy as a result of affluence, corruption and tyranny.

In Tafheemul Quran, Israel has been translated as "servant of God", which is a rendering accepted by most translators. In the Bible Israel is the surname used for Yaqub, the son of Ishaq and a grandson of Ibrahim. His descendants are known as Bene Israel. In the Testament the name is given to the confederation of the twelve tribes or sons of Israel. Judaism was the religion of Bene Israel and the name comes from Judah, the fourth son of Yaqub whose tribe,

together with that of his half brother, Benjamin, constituted the Kingdom of Judah in the south of Palestine, as opposed to the other tribes of Israel in the north. The word Jew is derived through the Latin Judaes and from the Hebrew, Yehudhi. The history of Jews is the history of Palestine, which has been described as "the physical centre of those movements of history from which the world has grown".

Judaism is based on monotheism, the belief in the one and only God, and the Covenant through which Israel was elected to be the bearer of this belief. The reference in the verses quoted above is to this Covenant which was to be "initiated by mighty acts of deliverance and to constitute the character of the divine election of Israel". This Covenant rested on moral principles and its operation depended on the commitment and loyalty of the people to these principles. The Covenant was ratified at Sinai where Moosa took his people after delivering them from bondage.

The basic principles of Judaism are : (1) Divine transcendence. (2) God is the sole creator of all things. (3) He is a personality possessed of ethical attributes. (4) Individual moral character must conform to the divine pattern. (5) Morality and religion are universal and inter-dependent. (6) The doctrine of election by virtue of which a people or individuals become the recipients of divine revelation which they are called upon to share with all men. (7) Unity of history: "every fresh phase in the historical process being a further stage in the development of the purpose of God for the establishment of His universal rule among all the sons of men".

Bene Israel established a great civilization and were exalted to a position above all other nations. But their craving for power and pursuit of materialism gradually undermined their commitment to principles and drove them to sinful ways. Their faith was corrupted by the introduction of evil cults, e.g., magic and necromancy, and as they settled down from a nomadic to an agricultural life they came under the influence of the fertility cults with child sacrifices, sacred prostitutes and depraved godlets. Different sects, the Pharisees'

the Sadducees, the Essenes, the Therapeutae, the Zealots and the Sicarii emerged, creating considerable controversy in Judaism. The worship of the golden calf was the supreme act of apostasy and this symbolized the ultimate degeneration of the Israelites.

Two important points emerge from a study of the history of Israelites in the Quran :

(1) That every nation has a fixed tenure during which it receives divine guidance and is provided with full opportunities to develop to its utmost capacity.

(2) As a nation becomes powerful and dominant it loses contact with the original source of guidance and adopts unjust and oppressive ways which lead to its destruction and replacement by another nation.

After the first three sections of this surah, which are of general application, there are ten sections which deal directly with the Israelites. The following observations made in Tafheemul Quran are relevant:[1]

First, there were many good people among the followers of the earlier prophets and the Prophet invited them to co-operate with him in his mission. They knew that the Quran contained the same message which was revealed to their prophets earlier. Unfortunately, many of them had taken to evil ways. The state to which they had degenerated was enough proof of their moral and religious depravity. The divine message had now been entrusted to another man who was engaged in the same mission to which their own prophets had devoted their lives earlier. He had been deputed to remind them of what they had lost in their pursuit of worldly gains. The pity was that instead of being the first to acknowledge him they had become his worst opponents.

Second, since the Jews were bent upon defying the Prophet, the argument had to be taken to its logical conclusion, so that the Jewish society was fully exposed. The Jews lost the position of leadership because they persistently violated and corrupted their own code of

1. Vol. I, page 70, Note 56.

guidance. Concrete instances were cited and they were reminded of specific incidents to prove how they had betrayed their faith. Questions were posed, one after another, and arguments marshalled in quick succession to establish the case against them. Their malicious designs against the Prophet, their plots, their vicious propaganda and all their sinister machinations were laid bare. This was necessary to show that their religious facade was intended only to hide corrupt and selfish ends.

The presentation of arguments in this form had three effects :—

(*a*) the sensible among the Jews realised their error and made amends, (*b*) the hold of the Jews on the people of Arabia in general and of Medina in particular was weakened, and (*c*) the exposure lowered the morale and the prestige of the Jews.

The history of Bene Israel is a standing reproof to all nations. They represent a people who deviated from the path of divine revelations and came to a dismal end. Their history reflects the universal principle that nations rise to great heights when they follow the right path and decline to slavery when they deviate from that path.

7

The Arrogance of Reason

وَاِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ اِنِّىْ جَاعِلٌ فِى الْاَرْضِ خَلِيْفَةً ؕ قَالُوْٓا اَتَجْعَلُ
فِيْهَا مَنْ يُّفْسِدُ فِيْهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَآءَ ۚ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَ
نُقَدِّسُ لَكَ ؕ قَالَ اِنِّىْٓ اَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُوْنَ ○ وَعَلَّمَ اٰدَمَ الْاَسْمَآءَ كُلَّهَا
ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ فَقَالَ اَنْۢبِـُٔوْنِىْ بِاَسْمَآءِ هٰٓؤُلَآءِ اِنْ كُنْتُمْ
صٰدِقِيْنَ ○ قَالُوْا سُبْحٰنَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَآ اِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا ؕ اِنَّكَ اَنْتَ الْعَلِيْمُ
الْحَكِيْمُ ○ قَالَ يٰٓاٰدَمُ اَنْۢبِئْهُمْ بِاَسْمَآئِهِمْ ۚ فَلَمَّآ اَنْۢبَاَهُمْ بِاَسْمَآئِهِمْ ۙ قَالَ
اَلَمْ اَقُلْ لَّكُمْ اِنِّىْٓ اَعْلَمُ غَيْبَ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ ۙ وَاَعْلَمُ مَا تُبْدُوْنَ وَ
مَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْتُمُوْنَ ○ وَاِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ اسْجُدُوْا لِاٰدَمَ فَسَجَدُوْٓا اِلَّآ
اِبْلِيْسَ ؕ اَبٰى وَاسْتَكْبَرَ ۫ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكٰفِرِيْنَ ○ (البقرة ٣٠-٣٤)

"Recall the time when your Lord said to the angels,
I will place a vicegerent on earth".
The angels submitted, "Will You
set up one who will create
disorder and indulge in violence
when we are engaged ceaselessly
in Your service and glorify Your name?"
"I know what you do not know", He said.
Then God taught Adam the names
of all things and showed them to the angels,
"Now if you are right, tell Me the names of these things".
"O Lord, we know only what You have taught us.

You are the All-Knowing, the All-Wise".
He turned then to Adam and said :
"Tell them of their names.
I know all that you reveal or conceal".
And when Adam named them
God said, "Did I not tell you
that I know the secrets of heaven and earth]?
And when We ordered the angels
to bow before Adam
they all obeyed except Iblis,
too proud to submit he became the defiant one.

(2 : 30-34)

THESE verses illustrate the difference between reason and faith. Man acquires knowledge and experience through reason and this helps him to understand and control his environment. It gives him a great sense of power. Faith represents a moral framework within which he conducts his life and that framework cannot be demonstrated or sustained by reason alone. An act of faith is essentially an act of acceptance and this is what gives direction and purpose to the life of a man of faith.

The last verse says that all the angels obeyed the command of God, except Iblis, who was too proud to submit and became the defiant one. What was the cause of Iblis' pride? What was it that made him different from the angels and how was he able to defy God's command? The answer is hidden in the mystery of creation but clearly Iblis represents one aspect of that dualism between good and evil, reason and faith, pride and humility, hope and fear which is in evidence in all spheres of human existence and endeavour. The cause of Iblis' pride could be no other than his total reliance on reason and it is this which made him arrogant and unwilling to bow before Adam.

In the same surah, an earlier verse clarifies this point. Referring to the hypocrites it is said, "and when they are told 'believe as others believe', they say: 'Shall we believe as the fools believe'?" (2 : 13)

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ آمِنُوا كَمَا آمَنَ النَّاسُ قَالُوا أَنُؤْمِنُ كَمَا آمَنَ السُّفَهَاءُ (البقرة : ١٣)

One sees how an act of belief is equated with an act of folly by those who rely entirely on their reason and intellect. They regard themselves too intelligent to believe what cannot be ascertained by reason. Belief, they think, is only for those who are ignorant and incapable of judging by reason alone. It is this attitude which Iblis represents in its extreme form. When God discloses to the angels His plan to establish Adam as His deputy on earth, the angels want to know why this should be necessary when they are available to carry out God's commands with the utmost dedication. They express the fear that such an arrangement may lead to disorder and violence. It is then demonstrated to them that the deputy possesses a quality which is beyond the capacity of the angels. In a comment on this, Abdullah Yusuf Ali says the angels represented only one side of creation. They did not possess the power of will for choosing and were without passion or emotion. Their perfection in other ways reflected God's perfection but could not raise them to the degree of vicegerency. 'The perfect vicegerent is he who has the power of initiative himself, but whose independent action always reflects perfectly the will of his principal'.

When the angels realised that God had conferred on Adam the faculty to know the nature of things they accepted the new arrangement as part of God's design and they bowed before Adam in submission. Iblis, on the other hand, was proud of his own powers. He was cynical of man's ability to fulfil the divine purpose. He asserted that he would abandon the path of righteousness and frustrate God's will and he offered to prove this if he were given an opportunity to do so. God allowed him this opportunity till the Day of Judgement.

It is interesting to note that the word Satan, which is the equivalent of Iblis, means an adversary and a plotter in Hebrew. The word Iblis occurs in the Quran nine times and *Shaitan* fifty-two

times. According to *Majma'ul-Bihar*, *Shaitan* denotes one who is far from the truth and Iblis one who is without hope, the meaning adopted in Tafheemul Quran. Iblis is man's adversary and this is his position in the conflict between good and evil. His arrogance is the result of the confidence he has in his intellectual power to divert man from the path of good.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَسْتَحْيِۦٓ أَنْ يَضْرِبَ مَثَلًا مَّا بَعُوضَةً فَمَا فَوْقَهَا ۚ فَأَمَّا
الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّهِمْ ۖ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا
فَيَقُولُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَٰذَا مَثَلًا ۘ يُضِلُّ بِهِۦ كَثِيرًا ۚ وَيَهْدِي
بِهِۦ كَثِيرًا ۚ وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهِۦٓ إِلَّا الْفَاسِقِينَ ۝ الَّذِينَ يَنقُضُونَ عَهْدَ
اللَّهِ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مِيثَاقِهِۦ وَيَقْطَعُونَ مَآ أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِۦٓ أَن يُوصَلَ
وَيُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ ۚ أُولَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ ۝

(البقرة . ۲۶، ۲۷)

"God does not hesitate to adduce
examples of gnats or things even humbler.
Those who believe see the aptness
and the truth of these illustrations.
But those who do not believe wonder
why God should mention such lowly creatures.
This is how a thing becomes a source of guidance for some
and misguidance for the others.
But only those people are misguided
who are arrogant and disobedient,
and violate their covenant with God,
dividing what God has ordained to be united
and creating disruption on earth.
They are the ones destined to lose."

(2 : 26-27)

THE same thing serves as a source of guidance to a man of faith and of misguidance to those who will not believe. They do not believe because they regard reason as infallible.

The Quran is a book of guidance. In order to derive full benefit from it one must develop a certain attitude of mind. This is how the point is explained in Tafheemul Quran.[1]

The essential qualities which a believer should develop are: (1) He should be able to discriminate between good and evil and guard his conduct. Every step that he takes should be conscious and deliberate and not the result of imitation or submission to passions. (2) He must believe that there are realities which cannot be directly perceived by the senses. These realities are: God, His attributes, the revelation, and the hereafter. The Prophet communicated his consciousness and experience of these realities to mankind and a believer must be prepared to accept them as an act of faith. (3) He should be devout in prayer, which in effect means that he must adopt and follow the code of conduct prescribed for him. (4) He should employ all his resources in the way of God and not for purely selfish and material ends.

The belief in the hereafter creates profound consequences. It is the belief in the hereafter which makes man accountable for his actions and compels him to accept the fact that existence on this earth is neither final nor lasting and that it will terminate at the appointed time which is in the knowledge of God alone. The state of existence on this earth will be followed by another state when each person will be called upon to account for his actions and will be fully rewarded or punished for his conduct. It is the consciousness of the hereafter which establishes the true standard of success or failure. Prosperity or the lack of it in this life is not what determines the value of man's actions. The really successful are those who have something positive to show when the final balance is struck.

1. Vol. I, page 50.

8

There is no Compulsion in Islam

لَآ إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَّبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَّكْفُرْ
بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقٰى لَا انْفِصَامَ
لَهَا وَاللهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ○ اَللهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ اٰمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُمْ مِّنَ
الظُّلُمٰتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓا أَوْلِيٰٓـؤُهُمُ الطَّاغُوتُ يُخْرِجُونَهُمْ
مِّنَ النُّورِ إِلَى الظُّلُمٰتِ أُولٰٓئِكَ أَصْحٰبُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خٰلِدُونَ ○
(البقرة : ٢٥٦، ٢٥٧)

In religion there is no compulsion.
Right stands distinguished from wrong.
Those who repel *taghut*
and repose their trust in God
acquire lasting and unbending support.
For God hears and knows all.
He guides and comforts them
and brings them out of darkness
and leads them into light.
Those who choose the path of defiance
become subservient to the minions of *taghut*
who drive them away from light
and plunge them into darkness.
They are destined for the fire
where they shall for ever reside. (2 : 256-257)

I HAVE not offered any English equivalent of the Arabic word, *taghut*. Hughes says in the Dictionary of Islam that *taghut* refers to an idol. In surah Alnisa verse 51 calls attention to the condition of the people who were given knowledge of the book but who

put their faith in *jibt* and *taghut.* In Tafheemul Quran *jibt* has been translated as superstition and *taghut* as one who exceeds all legitimate bounds.

Arberry translated it as idols and Rodwell retained *taghut* which he explained as "a name applied to an idol or idols—especially Allat and Ozza, the ancient idols of the Meccans. The termination of the word *taghut* is more Hebraic than pure Arabic, and literally means error". Abdullah Yusuf Ali preferred the word sorcery for *jibt* and evil for *taghut.* He says, *taghut* means the evil one, "the one who exceeds all bounds, satan ; or it may refer to some idol worshipped by pagan Arabs with whom the Jews of Medina were intriguing against the holy Apostle".

Pickthall translated these two words as 'idols and false deities" There are four notes on *taghut* in Tafheemul Quran.[1] According to these notes the word means excess and transgression. Anyone who exceeds all legitimate limits would be called *taghut.* In the Quran *taghut* refers to a person who exceeds his position as a servant of God and sets himself up as a potentate and compels the people to render him complete obedience. There are three stages in man's rebellion against God. First, when he agrees in principle to obey but disobeys in practice. This amounts to violation or *fisq.* Second, when he abandons the agreement in principle also and asserts his freedom to choose his own masters. This is defiance, *kufr.* Third, when he rebels against God and establishes his own rule over land and people and forces them to carry out his commands even though they may conflict with the commands of God. By then he has turned into *taghut.* It is essential for a true believer to denounce and resist *taghut* in all forms and manifestations.

Satan is the first *taghut* who misleads man by offering him all kinds of temptations. The second *taghut* is man's own self which diverts him from the right path and makes him a slave of his own desires and impulses. Then there are innumerable manifestations of *taghut* including friends, relations, family, tribe, society, nation, leaders and men of authority. Each one of

1. Notes 286 and 288 Surah Al-Baqarah, Note 3 Surah Al-Nahl and Note 35 Surah Al-Zumar.

them uses man for his own purpose and having once succumbed to their control man wastes his whole life in abject subservience, never being able to satisfy all his masters fully. *Taghut* refers as much to an attitude of mind as to a person or a group of persons. If man is the vicegerent of God *taghut* is the representative of Iblis.

Islam does not permit any compulsion or force in matters of religion. The Prophet is repeatedly reminded in the Quran that his mission is to convey the divine message completely and truthfully. He has to give the people a message of hope and also to warn them of the consequences of their conduct should they decide to abandon the right path. The Prophet is not responsible for the conduct of others for each man must take full and exclusive responsibility for his actions. The Quran itself is a book of persuasion and guidance and not a manual of arbitrary injunctions. This being the essence of the Quran it is inconceivable that any political philosopher or leader should arrogate to himself the authority to impose his will on the people.

The following verses bring out the difference between one who sets himself up as *taghut* and the one who conducts himself with humility as a believer.

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يُّعْجِبُكَ قَوْلُهٗ فِي الْحَيٰوةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيُشْهِدُ اللّٰهَ
عَلٰى مَا فِيْ قَلْبِهٖ وَهُوَ اَلَدُّ الْخِصَامِ ○ وَاِذَا تَوَلّٰى سَعٰى
فِي الْاَرْضِ لِيُفْسِدَ فِيْهَا وَيُهْلِكَ الْحَرْثَ وَالنَّسْلَ وَاللّٰهُ لَا
يُحِبُّ الْفَسَادَ ○ وَاِذَا قِيْلَ لَهُ اتَّقِ اللّٰهَ اَخَذَتْهُ الْعِزَّةُ بِالْاِثْمِ
فَحَسْبُهٗ جَهَنَّمُ وَلَبِئْسَ الْمِهَادُ ○ وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَّشْرِيْ
نَفْسَهُ ابْتِغَاۤءَ مَرْضَاتِ اللّٰهِ وَاللّٰهُ رَءُوْفٌ بِالْعِبَادِ ○ يٰۤاَيُّهَا
الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوا ادْخُلُوْا فِي السِّلْمِ كَاۤفَّةً وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوْا خُطُوٰتِ الشَّيْطٰنِ
اِنَّهٗ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِيْنٌ ○ فَاِنْ زَلَلْتُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاۤءَتْكُمُ
الْبَيِّنٰتُ فَاعْلَمُوْۤا اَنَّ اللّٰهَ عَزِيْزٌ حَكِيْمٌ ○ هَلْ يَنْظُرُوْنَ اِلَّاۤ
اَنْ يَّاْتِيَهُمُ اللّٰهُ فِيْ ظُلَلٍ مِّنَ الْغَمَامِ وَالْمَلٰۤئِكَةُ وَقُضِيَ الْاَمْرُ
وَاِلَى اللّٰهِ تُرْجَعُ الْاُمُوْرُ ○ (البقرة : ٢٠٤ - ٢١٠)

"Beware of the one who deludes you
With his worldly talk and appeals
to God to witness his sincerity.
He is the most devious of enemies.
Once in power
he bends all his energies to create discord and disruption
and destroys tillage and stock.
But God does not tolerate disruption.
And when he is reminded of God
he persists in defiance
lest his prestige should suffer.
He deserves nothing better than hell——a terrible abode.
Then there is the one who dedicates
himself to the service of God.
To such men God is most compassionate.
O believers! come fully into the fold of Islam
and follow not the devil,
he is to you an avowed enemy.
Once you have received clear signs do not falter.
You know that God is all powerful and wise.
Those who do not believe in spite of the signs
what do they wait for, but that God should appear under
a canopy of clouds attended by rows of angels
and decide the matter once and for all?
The day is not far off when all
matters will be finally determined by Him." (2 : 204-210)

Part THREE

9

Ibrahim's Prayer

وَاِذِ ابْتَلٰٓى اِبْرٰهٖمَ رَبُّهٗ بِكَلِمٰتٍ فَاَتَمَّهُنَّ ؕ قَالَ اِنِّىْ جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ
اِمَامًا ؕ قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِىْ ؕ قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِى الظّٰلِمِيْنَ ۝ وَاِذْ
جَعَلْنَا الْبَيْتَ مَثَابَةً لِّلنَّاسِ وَاَمْنًا ؕ وَاتَّخِذُوْا مِنْ مَّقَامِ اِبْرٰهٖمَ
مُصَلًّى ؕ وَعَهِدْنَآ اِلٰٓى اِبْرٰهٖمَ وَاِسْمٰعِيْلَ اَنْ طَهِّرَا بَيْتِىَ لِلطَّآئِفِيْنَ وَالْعٰكِفِيْنَ
وَالرُّكَّعِ السُّجُوْدِ ۝ وَاِذْ قَالَ اِبْرٰهٖمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هٰذَا بَلَدًا اٰمِنًا وَّ
ارْزُقْ اَهْلَهٗ مِنَ الثَّمَرٰتِ مَنْ اٰمَنَ مِنْهُمْ بِاللّٰهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْاٰخِرِ ؕ قَالَ وَ
مَنْ كَفَرَ فَاُمَتِّعُهٗ قَلِيْلًا ثُمَّ اَضْطَرُّهٗٓ اِلٰى عَذَابِ النَّارِ ؕ وَبِئْسَ
الْمَصِيْرُ ۝ وَاِذْ يَرْفَعُ اِبْرٰهٖمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَاِسْمٰعِيْلُ ؕ رَبَّنَا
تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا ؕ اِنَّكَ اَنْتَ السَّمِيْعُ الْعَلِيْمُ ۝ رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمَيْنِ لَكَ
وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِنَآ اُمَّةً مُّسْلِمَةً لَّكَ ۪ وَاَرِنَا مَنَاسِكَنَا وَتُبْ عَلَيْنَا ۚ اِنَّكَ
اَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيْمُ ۝ رَبَّنَا وَابْعَثْ فِيْهِمْ رَسُوْلًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُوْا عَلَيْهِمْ
اٰيٰتِكَ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتٰبَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُزَكِّيْهِمْ ؕ اِنَّكَ اَنْتَ الْعَزِيْزُ الْحَكِيْمُ ۝

(البقرة : ١٢٤ ١٢٩)

"Ibrahim was put to test by God in several ways
and when he came out successful,
God said to him, "I am going to make you a leader of men".
"And my descendants?" asked Ibrahim.
"My Covenant does not extend to the transgressors" was His answer.
And We declared Mecca as a resort and a sanctuary for the people

and We asked them to raise a permanent place of worship
where Ibrahim used to pray.
We Covenanted with Ibrahim and Ismail
to sanctify the place for those who came
to visit, to meditate, to bow, and to prostrate in worship.
Ibrahim turned to God and prayed :
"Lord, make this a city of peace
and provide to the people of this city,
who believe in God and in the hereafter, fruits of all kinds."
The answer came, "even to those who do not believe
shall be granted sustenance during their life on earth.
But in the end they will be
dragged to the torments of hell, which is the worst of destinations."
Remember the great moment
when Ibrahim and Ismail raised
the foundations of this house and prayed :
"O Lord ! accept this from us
for You are the all-knowing, the all-hearing.
O Lord ! make us Muslims and our progeny a nation dedicated to You.
Guide us in our prayer and forgive us our sins.
You are the most compassionate and merciful.
O Lord! send forth to these people a prophet of their own
who will convey your message to them
and furbish their hearts with wisdom
and with the light of the Book.
You are the Exalted One, the Wise One." (2 : 124-129)

This prayer of Ibrahim is one of the most beautiful and moving prayers in the Quran. The words are the words of communion and they express man's deepest desires. The response is immediate. A sincere prayer is its own fulfilment. The moment of prayer is the moment of achievement because prayer is as much a commitment as an expression of hope. The more profound the commitment the more instant and certain the fruition of hope.

The following points made in Tafheemul Quran should be helpful in understanding these verses :

(1) The trials to which Ibrahim was subjected are mentioned at various places in the Quran. Ibrahim displayed tremendous fortitude and went through prolonged suffering and persecution with great forbearance and it was then that he was chosen as the leader of mankind. Once Ibrahim realized the truth, thereafter his whole life was dedicated to its pursuit. It was a life of sacrifice, a complete reflection and model of truth to which he was committed. He was forced to abandon everything that man loves in this world and was exposed to every danger which strikes terror in the heart of man but nothing could make him deviate from his path.

(2) The Covenant promised the leadership of mankind to Ibrahim but it was made clear that the promise extended only to those of his descendants who remained on the right path. The Covenant carried no guarantee that Ibrahim's descendants would retain the privilege of leadership regardless of their conduct. The Israelites were later to contend that prophethood belonged to the house of Israel. Here it is explained that the Covenant was made with Ibrahim and applied only to those of his descendants who qualified for it by their conduct, and not by their ancestry. The transgressors were specifically excluded from the Covenant.

(3) The reference to the sanctification of Kaaba does not merely mean that the place should be kept clean. The sanctity of the house of God demands that no name other than that of God should be raised in that house. Whosoever bows before another and seeks help from him sets up an associate with God and thus commits an act of great impurity.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali has commented : "With prophetic vision he (Ibrahim) foresees that there will be corruption and backsliding

in both branches of his family: Mecca will house 360 idols, and Jerusalem will become a harlot city (Ezekiel XVI, 15), a seat of abomination. But the light of Islam will shine, and reclaim the lost people in both branches and indeed in all the world. So he prayed for Allah's mercy, addressing Him as oft-returning, most merciful. And he finally foresees in Mecca an apostle teaching the people as one of their own, and in their own beautiful language: he asks for a blessing on Mohammad's ministry, appealing to the power and wisdom of Allah."

When Ibrahim prays that the people of the city should be provided with fruits of all kinds as they believe in God and in the hereafter the answer comes that means of livelihood are assured to all living beings regardless of whether they are believers or non-believers. Title to leadership is one thing and claim to livelihood another. Leadership is reserved for the righteous among the believers but livelihood will be provided to believers as well as non-believers. This should clarify the point that if someone is enjoying all the luxuries of life it does not necessarily represent the reward of good conduct or signify God's approval.

When Ibrahim says to his Lord : "Send forth to these people a prophet of their own" his words are both a forecast and a prayer. The task of carrying the message of God to mankind was finally entrusted to Mohammad and his task embraced the theoretical as well as the practical aspects of life. By reciting divine verses to the people the Prophet conveyed to them his consciousness and knowledge of the right path and explained to them the principles which should guide their conduct. In practical terms the Prophet's own life was a model for mankind and it was through his conduct that he helped others to improve their lives. I have translated the words *Wa Yuzakkihim* "and furbish their hearts" according to the Urdu translation by Abul Kalam Azad. Most translators have used the words "and sanctify them" or "purify them". But the Arabic word implies the existence of pollution or rust which must be rubbed off to restore the original lustre. This rendering is more appropriate considering that the

audience to which these words were addressed consisted of people who had received divine guidance but had lost contact with the original message and as a result their vision was clouded and their hearts muffled.

This brings us to the word, Muslim "O Lord, make us Muslims". According to Abdullah Yusuf Ali, "the root, salama, in the word Islam implies (among other ideas) the idea of peace, and therefore when Mecca is the city of Islam, it is also the city of peace. The same root occurs in the latter part of the name, Jerusalem, the Jewish city of peace. When the day of Jerusalem passed Mecca became the new Jerusalem—or rather the old and original city of peace restored and made universal".

In Tafheemul Quran the word Muslim has been defined as one who bows before God in complete submission, who accepts God as his sole master, ruler and protector, who abandons himself wholly to the will of God and undertakes to lead his life entirely in accordance with His guidance. It is this belief and this code of conduct which is called Islam and which is the religion of all prophets among all the nations and the areas of the world from the earliest days.

10

In Moments of Distress

وَمِنْهُم مَّن يَسْتَمِعُ إِلَيْكَ وَجَعَلْنَا عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ أَكِنَّةً أَن يَفْقَهُوهُ
وَفِي آذَانِهِمْ وَقْرًا وَإِن يَرَوْا كُلَّ آيَةٍ لَّا يُؤْمِنُوا بِهَا حَتَّىٰ
إِذَا جَاءُوكَ يُجَادِلُونَكَ يَقُولُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِنْ هَٰذَا إِلَّا أَسَاطِيرُ
الْأَوَّلِينَ ○ وَهُمْ يَنْهَوْنَ عَنْهُ وَيَنْأَوْنَ عَنْهُ وَإِن يُهْلِكُونَ
إِلَّا أَنفُسَهُمْ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ ○ وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذْ وُقِفُوا عَلَى النَّارِ
فَقَالُوا يَا لَيْتَنَا نُرَدُّ وَلَا نُكَذِّبَ بِآيَاتِ رَبِّنَا وَنَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ○
بَلْ بَدَا لَهُم مَّا كَانُوا يُخْفُونَ مِن قَبْلُ وَلَوْ رُدُّوا لَعَادُوا لِمَا
نُهُوا عَنْهُ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَكَاذِبُونَ ○ وَقَالُوا إِنْ هِيَ إِلَّا حَيَاتُنَا الدُّنْيَا وَ
مَا نَحْنُ بِمَبْعُوثِينَ ○ وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذْ وُقِفُوا عَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ قَالَ أَلَيْسَ هَٰذَا
بِالْحَقِّ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ وَرَبِّنَا قَالَ فَذُوقُوا الْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ ○
قَدْ خَسِرَ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِلِقَاءِ اللَّهِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَتْهُمُ السَّاعَةُ
بَغْتَةً قَالُوا يَا حَسْرَتَنَا عَلَىٰ مَا فَرَّطْنَا فِيهَا وَهُمْ يَحْمِلُونَ
أَوْزَارَهُمْ عَلَىٰ ظُهُورِهِمْ أَلَا سَاءَ مَا يَزِرُونَ ○ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا
إِلَّا لَعِبٌ وَلَهْوٌ وَلَلدَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ لِّلَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ أَفَلَا
تَعْقِلُونَ ○ قَدْ نَعْلَمُ إِنَّهُ لَيَحْزُنُكَ الَّذِي يَقُولُونَ فَإِنَّهُمْ لَا يُكَذِّبُونَكَ
وَلَٰكِنَّ الظَّالِمِينَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ يَجْحَدُونَ ○ وَلَقَدْ كُذِّبَتْ رُسُلٌ
مِّن قَبْلِكَ فَصَبَرُوا عَلَىٰ مَا كُذِّبُوا وَأُوذُوا حَتَّىٰ أَتَاهُمْ نَصْرُنَا

وَلَا مُبَدِّلَ لِكَلِمٰتِ اللّٰهِ ۚ وَلَقَدْ جَآءَكَ مِنْ نَّبَاِى الْمُرْسَلِيْنَ ○
وَاِنْ كَانَ كَبُرَ عَلَيْكَ اِعْرَاضُهُمْ فَاِنِ اسْتَطَعْتَ اَنْ تَبْتَغِىَ نَفَقًا فِى
الْاَرْضِ اَوْ سُلَّمًا فِى السَّمَآءِ فَتَاْتِيَهُمْ بِاٰيَةٍ ۗ وَلَوْ شَآءَ اللّٰهُ
لَجَمَعَهُمْ عَلَى الْهُدٰى فَلَا تَكُوْنَنَّ مِنَ الْجٰهِلِيْنَ ○ اِنَّمَا يَسْتَجِيْبُ
الَّذِيْنَ يَسْمَعُوْنَ ۘ وَالْمَوْتٰى يَبْعَثُهُمُ اللّٰهُ ثُمَّ اِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُوْنَ ○
(الأنعام ٦: ٢٥ - ٣٦)

THERE are moments when the Quran addresses the Prophet directly, particularly when he is in distress. The situation is analysed, the point at issue discussed at length and the Prophet is guided and consoled.

One such moment occurs in the above verses in surah Al-Anaam. The Prophet had been engaged in his mission for twelve years. The persecution by the Qureish was at its peak. A large number of the believers had been forced to migrate to Abyssinia. The whole community was up in arms against the Prophet and those who followed him were subjected to severe hardships, iniquities and dangers. It was in this state that this surah, which runs serenely as a river, was revealed to the Prophet. A person in distress could derive great strength and inspiration from this surah and discover undying springs of hope and courage.

Here is a translation of these verses which are addressed to the Prophet :

> There are some among them who listen to you intently,
> but they are dull of hearing and their hearts are muffled,
> so nothing penetrates into their mind.
> Let them be shown any sign, they will not believe.
> They come to you only to dispute.
> And the disbelievers among them
> dismiss what you tell them as nothing but old tales.
> They do not allow themselves to be persuaded by truth
> and dissuade the others too.

But do not think that they harm your cause,
they only harm themselves, though they do not know.
Imagine them standing on the brink of hell
when they will say: if only we could
return to the earth, we will join the believers,
and defy the signs of God no more.
Not that they mean this.
What else can they say confronted with what they denied?
Were they to be sent back, they
will do exactly what they used to do.
They are inveterate liars.
Here they claim; this is the only life we have
and we shall not be raised after we die.
If only you could see them arraigned before their Lord,
"Is this not the truth?" He will ask,
and they will submit, "Yes, O Lord."
"Well then", He will ordain, "suffer
now the consequences of your disbelief."
Lost are those who deny the return to
God till the hour is upon them.
Then they exclaim: Oh, what a terrible mistake we made!
There they are with their sins on their back.
Look, what a frightful burden they bear!
Life is but transient pleasure.
The hereafter is a better abode for the righteous.
Do you not understand this?
O, Muhammad !
We know you are grieved by what they say.
They denounce not you but the message of God.
Before you too the prophets were denounced.
But they suffered patiently till we came to their rescue.
No one can change the word of God.
And you know something of what the prophets had to go through.
Still, if you find the indifference of the people unbearable,
then if you have the strength

raise a ladder to the sky
or dig a tunnel into the earth and
find them some convincing proof?
Had God willed it so they would
all have submitted to guidance.
Let there be no mistake,
only those who hear respond to the call.
As for the dead, they will remain
in their graves till they are raised by God.
And to Him they shall return. (6 : 25-36)

Some of the explanatory notes on these verses in Tafheem-ul-Quran are translated below to clarify the meanings.

We have all heard educated persons refer to the Quran as something out-of-date. This is not a phenomenon peculiar to our age. Even in the days of the Prophet there were people who found nothing new in the Quran. They used to dismiss the earlier revealed books in a similar fashion. It is customary with a certain kind of people that whenever they are invited to the path of righteousness they say, 'we have heard all this before. You are saying nothing new'. As if a statement to be true must also be new and whatever is old must necessarily be false. Truth is eternal. It does not change though our understanding of it might change with the passage of time. Those who instruct people in the light of divine guidance present universal truths. But there are people who pride themselves on the originality of their minds and are prepared to ignore the universal in their anxiety to produce something novel or unique.

'Life is but transient pleasure'. This does not mean that life is not a serious business and it is only a diversion. It is in relation to the true and abiding state in the hereafter that life in this world is described as a temporary phase of pleasure. It is a kind of play in which man starts treating the act as the reality. Just as a person playing the role of a king in a play might start imagining himself as a real king. He mounts the throne, sports a crown and sees that whatever he commands is obeyed. For a moment he forgets that the director might depose him, despatch

him to a dungeon, even have him executed. Such dramas are enacted all over the world. There are deities to whom people turn for help when they have no power to help. Some claim knowledge of the unknown when they have no such knowledge. There are those who set themselves up as sustainers of others when they are themselves dependent on someone else for their sustenance. The man who claims to be the arbiter of the fate of people under his jurisdiction and imagines that their fortunes depend on his will and decides whether they shall be honoured or dishonoured forgets that he is but a slave and with one turn of fate he may be brought low and placed at the feet of those over whom he holds sway. All these little plays end as soon as the moment of death arrives. On the other side, there is nothing but truth in its stark reality and everything is weighed in the scale of justice to determine its real worth.

"No one can change the word of God." There is a law governing the struggle between good and evil and no one can interfere with this law. The righteous must go through a prolonged test of fire. Their patience, truthfulness, spirit of sacrifice, faith and belief in God must be tried. It is only through this process that they can develop real strength and courage. They must demonstrate the superiority of their moral weapons and dispel the forces of ignorance. Once they have established their worth, God will grant them assistance and bless them with success. This assistance comes only when the time is ripe.

11

The Quranic Concept of Justice

THE Quranic concept of justice is based on the following elements :

Balance.
Equity.
Duty.
Trust.

1. *Balance* :

To illustrate this one should refer to the following verses of the Quran :

فَإِن كَذَّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كُذِّبَ رُسُلٌ مِّن قَبْلِكَ جَاءُو بِالْبَيِّنَٰتِ وَالزُّبُرِ
وَالْكِتَٰبِ الْمُنِيرِ ۝ (آل عمران : ١٨٤)

"Every soul shall taste death ;
you shall surely be paid in full
your wages on the Day of Resurrection". (3 : 184)

And a little earlier in the same surah, verse 161 says :

وَمَا كَانَ لِنَبِيٍّ أَن يَغُلَّ ۚ وَمَن يَغْلُلْ يَأْتِ بِمَا غَلَّ يَوْمَ
الْقِيَٰمَةِ ۚ ثُمَّ تُوَفَّىٰ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ۝
(آل عمران : ١٦١)

"It is not for a prophet to be fraudulent;
Whoso defrauds he shall bring the fruits of his fraud on the Day of Resurrection;
then every soul shall be paid in full what it has earned,
and they shall not be wronged".

In surah Al-Nisa verse 40 says :

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَظْلِمُ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ ۚ وَإِن تَكُ حَسَنَةً يُضَاعِفْهَا
وَيُؤْتِ مِن لَّدُنْهُ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ۝ (النساء : ٤٠)

"Surely God shall not wrong so much as the weight of an ant;
and if it be a good deed, He will double it,
and give from Himself a mighty wage".

In surah Al-Zumar, verses 68 and 70, it is said :

وَنُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَصَعِقَ مَن فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَن فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا
مَن شَاءَ اللَّهُ ۖ ثُمَّ نُفِخَ فِيهِ أُخْرَىٰ فَإِذَا هُمْ قِيَامٌ يَنظُرُونَ ۝ وَ
أَشْرَقَتِ الْأَرْضُ بِنُورِ رَبِّهَا وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَابُ وَجِيءَ بِالنَّبِيِّينَ وَ
الشُّهَدَاءِ وَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُم بِالْحَقِّ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ۝ وَوُفِّيَتْ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ
مَّا عَمِلَتْ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَفْعَلُونَ ۝ (الزمر : ٦٨ - ٧٠)

"For the trumpet shall be blown, and whosoever is in the heavens
And whosoever is in the earth shall swoon save whom God wills.
Then it shall be blown again, and lo they shall stand, beholding.
And the earth shall shine with the light of its Lord and the Book shall be set in place,
and the prophets and witnesses shall be brought,
And justly the issue be decided between them and they not wronged.
Every soul shall be paid in full for what it has wrought;
and knows very well what they do". (39 : 68-71)*

The significant points in the above verses are the inevitability of death and the certainty that the final account will be fully and

*The above translations are from Arberry.

justly rendered on the appointed day. In the settlement of this final account there are three concepts which are emphasised.

(*i*) That no one shall be wronged in the slightest degree.

(*ii*) And that the reward of a good deed shall be multiplied. Since the universe is moving toward ultimate good evil has to be nullified and a balance in favour of good maintained.

(*iii*) The whole system has a rational basis. The words used are "wages" and "that which has been earned". This puts the maintenance of the account in accordance with concrete and accepted facts.

2. *Equity* :

Related to the concept of the preponderance of good is the element of equity in the administration of justice. While the reward of good is multiplied through God's grace, it is through His infinite mercy that the extent and rigour of retribution is reduced. This is expressed in the following verse:

وَلَوْ يُؤَاخِذُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بِظُلْمِهِم مَّا تَرَكَ عَلَيْهَا مِن دَابَّةٍ
وَلَٰكِن يُؤَخِّرُهُمْ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى (النحل : ٦١)

"And if Allah were to take mankind to task for their wrong doing,
He would not leave hereon a living creature,
but He reprieveth them to an appointed time". (16: 61)

Again in surah Al-Fatir, verse 45, it is said :

وَلَوْ يُؤَاخِذُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بِمَا كَسَبُوا مَا تَرَكَ عَلَىٰ ظَهْرِهَا مِن دَابَّةٍ
وَلَٰكِن يُؤَخِّرُهُمْ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى (فاطر : ٤٥)

"If God should take men to task for what they have earned
He would not leave upon the face of the earth one creature that crawls;
but He is deferring them to a stated term".

Man is liable to succumb to temptation. His instincts and urges overpower his judgement at times and he goes astray. The creator established him on earth to develop through a continual struggle betwen good and evil. God guides him and supports him in this stuggle against the forces of evil and condones his lapses so that he may be able to contribute to the ultimate balance of good which alone will bring him happiness on the Day of Reckoning.

It is this element of God's infinite mercy which acts as an eternal spring of hope. But for this, man would be plunged into an abyss of frustration and hopelessness after having committed a single serious lapse. In such an event the rest of his life would become meaningless and futile. Connected with this is the process of recovery by man which is implied in the concept of repentance (*taubah*). *Taubah* is essentially a contract with the future not merely an expression of sincere regret for the past. This contract is based on a commitment to avoid in future what resulted in sin in the past.

The element of equity is emphasised so that man develops sympathy and understanding for his fellow beings and those who administer justice do not act in a ruthless and unforgiving manner.

3. *Duty* :

In surah Al-Araf, verse 29, the opening line is :

قُلْ أَمَرَ رَبِّي بِالْقِسْطِ (الأعراف : ٢٩)

"Say my Lord enjoins justice".

The word *Qist* in this verse signifies justice in its broadest sense and emphasises the distinction between right and wrong, and truth and falsehood. Under this are considered questions of jurisdiction, administration of justice without fear or favour, and the imperative of maintaining the balance of justice equally between Muslims and non-Muslims and between friends and foes.

Surah Al-Nisa, verse 135 :

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ اٰمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوّٰمِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَآءَ لِلّٰهِ وَلَوْ عَلٰٓى
اَنْفُسِكُمْ اَوِ الْوَالِدَيْنِ وَالْاَقْرَبِينَ ۚ اِنْ يَّكُنْ غَنِيًّا اَوْ فَقِيرًا فَاللّٰهُ
اَوْلٰى بِهِمَا ۖ فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا الْهَوٰٓى اَنْ تَعْدِلُوا ۚ وَاِنْ تَلْوٗٓا اَوْ
تُعْرِضُوا فَاِنَّ اللّٰهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا ○ (النسآء، ١٣٥)

"O you who believe,
be maintainers of justice,
bearers of witness for Allah,
even though it be against your own selves
or (your) parents or near relatives—whether he be rich or poor.
Allah has a better right over them both.
So follow not (your) low desires, lest you deviate.
And if you distort or turn away from (truth),
surely Allah is ever aware of what you do."

In this verse the believers are told ;

(*i*) To maintain justice.

(*ii*) To bear witness for the sake of God.

(*iii*) To act justly even though the decision may go against oneself, one's parents or near relations.

(*iv*) Not to differentiate between the rich and the poor in matters of justice.

(*v*) Not to allow fear or favour to divert one from the path of justice.

(*vi*) Not to act under hidden motives.

All these instructions are to be carried out within the framework provided by two guiding principles :

(1) God is aware of what you do, and

(2) God takes best care of His people.

The first principle ensures that justice is conducted openly and fearlessly and the second that all considerations not related to the issue under determination are eliminated. This also establishes

the principle that final judgement rests with God who knows best what is good for His people.

Some aspects of this are clarified in surah Al-Maida, verse 42, where disbelievers are referred to as "listeners for the sake of falsehood: greedy for illicit gains". And then addressing the Prophet, it says :—

فَإِنْ جَاءُوكَ فَاحْكُمْ بَيْنَهُمْ أَوْ أَعْرِضْ عَنْهُمْ ۚ وَإِنْ تُعْرِضْ
عَنْهُمْ فَلَنْ يَضُرُّوكَ شَيْئًا ۖ وَإِنْ حَكَمْتَ فَاحْكُمْ بَيْنَهُمْ بِالْقِسْطِ ۚ
إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ ۝ (المائدة : ٤٢)

"If then they have recourse unto thee
judge between them or disclaim jurisdiction.
If thou disclaim jurisdiction, they cannot harm thee at all.
But if thou judgest, judge between them with equity.
Lo, Allah loveth the equitable." (Pickthall)

That justice is imposed as a duty on man is clear from surah Al-Anaam, verse 152. In this verse it is enjoined that in matters relating to the property of orphans, "full measure and weight with equity" should be given and immediately after that is said :

لَا نُكَلِّفُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا ۖ وَإِذَا قُلْتُمْ فَاعْدِلُوا وَلَوْ كَانَ
ذَا قُرْبَىٰ ۖ (الأنعام : ١٥٢)

"We impose not on any soul a duty except to the extent of its ability.

And when you speak, be just, though it be against a relative"

4. *Trust* :

This brings us to the question of trust which is the fourth element in the Quranic concept of justice. Since justice is imposed as a duty on man this duty must be discharged by each person according to his capacity. Those who are placed in positions of higher responsibility carry a greater burden of trust. Let us refer now to surah Al-Nisa, verse 58, which has been translated

as follows :

إِنَّ اللّٰهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمٰنٰتِ إِلٰى أَهْلِهَا ۙ وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ
بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ ۚ (النساء : ٥٨)

1. "Lo, Allah commandeth you that ye restore deposits to their owners,
   and if ye judge between mankind that ye judge justly."
   (Pickthall)

2. "God commands you to deliver trusts back to their owners; and when you judge between the people, that you judge with justice." (J. Arberry)

The highest positions of trust require the discharge of the responsibility of justice in the highest sense and it is vital that people should exercise the greatest care in the selection of men to whom responsibilities are given as a matter of trust.

With this background I shall now attempt an interpretation of some of the verses quoted above and try to present the Quranic concept of justice. I shall follow the order in which they appear in the Quran.

First, I take up surah Al-Nisa verse 135. I shall give my translation of the text and then a rendering of the relevant notes from Tafheem-ul-Quran.

"O believers, uphold justice
and bear witness in God's name
even though your decision and evidence may affect your person
or your parents or your relations.
The parties to a dispute may be rich or poor.
God is interested more than you in their welfare.
So do not hestitate to act justly because of your own inclinations
Should you prevaricate or hesitate to face the truth
you will have to account for it,
for God is aware of what you do."

It is not enough that you should conduct yourself in a fair manner, you must uphold justice. It is not enough that you act justly yourself, you must carry on a relentless struggle for the establishment of a just order in society. Persecution and injustice must be replaced by understanding and justice. You have to act as a pillar on which a just social structure can rest.

Your evidence must be for the sake of God alone. No personal consideration or interest should affect your decision because in the ultimate analysis you are answerable to God.

The concept of justice is based on two elements: first, that a reasonable balance and proportion should be maintained among the people in respect of their rights. Second, that everyone should receive what is due to him without any hindrance. The Urdu word, *Insaf*, creates unnecessary difficulties by suggesting that rights have to be equally distributed between two persons and from this it is inferred that justice means equal distribution. What justice demands is a fair and reasonable balance and right proportion not equal distribution of rights. Of course, in certain respects justice does ensure equality among people as in respect of their rights as citizens but there are other spheres in which justice is not synonymous with equal distribution, such as between parents and children in social status or in the payment of wages for work of a higher or lower level. What is enjoined here is that the claims of individuals should be determined in society in a balanced fashion and that everyone must be strictly assured of his moral, social, economic, legal, political and personal rights.

There is another aspect of justice brought out in surah Al-Shura, verse 15, where the Prophet is asked to state firmly :

وَقُلْ اٰمَنْتُ بِمَآ اَنْزَلَ اللّٰهُ مِنْ كِتٰبٍ ۚ وَاُمِرْتُ لِاَعْدِلَ
بَيْنَكُمْ ۗ اَللّٰهُ رَبُّنَا وَرَبُّكُمْ ۗ لَنَآ اَعْمَالُنَا وَلَكُمْ اَعْمَالُكُمْ ۗ لَا
حُجَّةَ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ ۗ (الشورٰى : ١٥)

"I believe in the Book revealed by God.

I am required to do justice to you.
Allah is our God as he is your God.
We are responsible for what we do
and you are responsible for what you do.
There is no quarrel between us."

One meaning of this comprehensive verse is that I have been appointed to do justice keeping myself aloof from all party or sectarian affiliations. It is not for me to act in favour of one group or against another. My relationship with mankind is on the basis of equality and justice. Whoever is in the wrong I must oppose him even though he may be closely related to me. Whoever is in the right I must support him even though he may belong to a hostile camp. The other meaning is that the truth which I offer to you makes no distinction between people. It is equally applicable to everyone rich or poor, high or low. They do not have different rights because they belong to different categories. That which is wrong is wrong for all. That which is forbidden is forbidden to all. That which is a crime is a crime for all. In this code there is no exception available to anyone, not even to me.

The third meaning is that I have been called upon to establish a just order and it is my duty to determine matters affecting different people in a fair and just manner. I must endeavour to eliminate excesses and injustice which have affected your life and your society.

This concept is further elaborated in surah **Al-Rahman**, verses 7, 8, and 9:—

وَالسَّمَاءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ الْمِيزَانَ ۝ أَلَّا تَطْغَوْا فِي الْمِيزَانِ ۝ وَأَقِيمُوا
الْوَزْنَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا تُخْسِرُوا الْمِيزَانَ ۝ (الرحمٰن : ٧-٩)

"He raised the heavens and introduced balance.
Now don't you disturb the balance.
Weigh with justice
and skimp not in the balance."

The interpreters have mostly understood balance in the sense of justice and introducing balance has been taken as the grand design of the universe based on a just balance. Innumerable stars and satellites in their orbit, the massive forces of nature at work and the infinite variety of creatures and things found in the world have all been placed in a measured arrangement. But for this the whole design would have collapsed. For billions of years now life has been going on and the principle of balance has remained unalterably applicable.

Since the universe is based on a balanced arrangement you too should act in a balanced manner. Whatever your area of authority you must act in that with fairness and if you are entrusted with the rights of people any betrayal of that trust will bring you in conflict with a fundamental principle of this universe which does not tolerate injustice and persecution. Even the slightest transgression here would upset the whole balance. In these three verses the second most important lesson of the Quran has been expressed. The first is *Tawheed* and the second is Justice.

To conclude I take up surah Al-Nisa, verse 58 :—

> "O Muslims,
> God commands you to entrust responsibility to those who are capable of discharging it.
> And when you determine between people do so justly.
> This is invaluable advice from God who hears and sees every thing."

You must avoid the grave mistake which Bene Israel made and this was that during their period of decline they handed over positions of trust to people who were incompetent, dishonest, immoral and untruthful. The result was that under the leadership of such people a whole nation was destroyed. Muslims are warned not to make the mistake of choosing or appointing people to positions of responsibility when they know that those people are not capable of discharging those responsibilities justly and honestly.

The word *Amanah* (trust) in this verse was explained by the Prophet as pertaining to 'Government or affairs of state.' The Prophet said, "When trust is wasted wait for the *sa'ah* i.e. hour of doom." He was asked how will the trust be wasted and he replied : "When Government is entrusted to those unworthy of it."*

12

On Prohibition

يَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ قُلْ فِيهِمَآ إِثْمٌ كَبِيرٌ وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ
وَإِثْمُهُمَآ أَكْبَرُ مِن نَّفْعِهِمَا ۚ (سُوْرَةُ الْبَقَرَة : ٢١٩)

"They ask you regarding drinking and gambling,
tell them : both are exceedingly bad, and
though they provide some diversion
their evil far exceeds their good." (2 : 219)

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَقْرَبُوا الصَّلَوٰةَ وَأَنتُمْ سُكَٰرَىٰ حَتَّىٰ تَعْلَمُوا
مَا تَقُولُونَ (النِّسَآء ، ٤٣)

"O believers, do not offer the prayer
in a state of inebriation." (4 : 43)

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا إِنَّمَا الْخَمْرُ وَالْمَيْسِرُ وَالْأَنصَابُ وَ
الْأَزْلَٰمُ رِجْسٌ مِّنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَٰنِ فَاجْتَنِبُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ۝
(الْمَآئِدَة ، ٩٠)

"O believers, this drinking and gambling,
these games of chance,
and offerings to idols
are evil occupations
avoid them
and you will be better off." (5 : 90)

I HAVE translated the above verses in the order in which they were revealed. The first injunction does not go beyond an expression of disapproval of drinking and gambling. It is offered as an argument to persuade the people not to indulge in drinking and gambling

because they derive some pleasure or advantage from them. The excitement and diversion which drinking and gambling provide is not denied but in the long run they produce unfortunate and sometime disastrous results.

As soon as the first order was received a section of the believers gave up drinking but a large number among them continued to take alcohol. They would go to the mosque to offer their prayer while they were still under the influence of drink and very often they made serious mistakes in the recitation of the Quran. The Arabic word *khamr* which I have translated as drinking is "literally understood to mean fermented juice of the grape; applied by analogy to all fermented liquor" (Abdullah Yusuf Ali). It also refers to "any intoxicating thing that clouds or obscures (lit., covers) the intellect".

The second verse was revealed probably in the fourth year after Hijra and it specifically forbade the people from coming to the mosque to offer the prayer in a state of inebriation. To comply with the letter of the injunction many people changed their drinking habits and avoided taking alcohol during those hours which coincided with the times of the prayer. In this order the word used is *sukara*, which I have translated as "a state of inebriation". This state is not necessarily produced by alcohol alone but could be the result of the use of drugs or other intoxicants.

The third verse resulted in total prohibition. The Prophet had it proclaimed, before this verse was revealed, that alcohol was disapproved and its consumption was likely to be totally banned. So those people who had stocks of alcohol in their possession were advised to dispose of them. When this verse was revealed it was announced that those who possessed alcohol were forbidden to consume it or to sell it. It was ordered that all the stocks should be destroyed. It is then that alcohol was poured into the drains of Medina.

Some people asked the Prophet whether they could offer their stocks to the Jews as a gift. "That which is forbidden is not a fit gift" was the Prophet's reply. It was also suggested that whatever

wine was available may be converted into vinegar but the Prophet did not approve of the idea and insisted that it should be destroyed. One person specifically asked whether alcohol could be used as a medicine. The Prophet answered, "It is not a medicine, it is a disease". Another person submitted that his people lived in a cold area where they had to work very hard to earn their livelihood. They needed alcohol to fight the cold and the fatigue. "Whatever you drink, does it have the effect of intoxication?", enquired the Prophet. The man replied, "Yes". The Prophet ruled, "then it should be avoided". The man expressed some doubt whether his people would agree to this. "Then you must fight them and make them agree to this", ordered the Prophet.

The Prophet enunciated the principle that if something results in intoxication when used in large quantities, its use in small quantities is also forbidden. "If a whole cup intoxicates even a sip of it is prohibited".*

There are two misconceptions which need to be removed. The first arises from the fact that the third order in verse 90, surah 5 does not prohibit the use of alcohol, it only requires one to "avoid it". The second is due to the view that since no punishment is prescribed in the Quran for drinking it is not a serious offence. Now it is true that the word *fa ajtanebu* does not mean "you are forbidden" drink. Pickthall translated it as "leave it (alcohol) aside". Rodwell and Arberry preferred the rendering, "so avoid it". Abdullah Yusuf Ali translated it as "eschew it". When one is asked to avoid something, is it reasonable to suggest that one may avoid it if one prefers to do so and may not avoid it if one is so inclined? The dictionary meaning of the word avoid is "to have nothing to do with". So with reference to alcohol it is enjoined that you should have nothing to do with it. That is why people got rid of whatever alcohol they had in their possession as soon as the third order was revealed. The verses immediately following the one in which this prohibitory order is contained should remove all doubts

* Notes 235, page 167; 65; page 354; 109; page 501, Vol. I, Tafheemul Quran.

in the matter.

إِنَّمَا يُرِيْدُ الشَّيْطٰنُ اَنْ يُّوْقِعَ بَيْنَكُمُ الْعَدَاوَةَ وَالْبَغْضَآءَ
فِي الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ وَيَصُدَّكُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللّٰهِ وَعَنِ الصَّلٰوةِ ۚ
فَهَلْ اَنْتُمْ مُّنْتَهُوْنَ ○ وَاَطِيْعُوا اللّٰهَ وَاَطِيْعُوا الرَّسُوْلَ
وَاحْذَرُوْا ۚ فَاِنْ تَوَلَّيْتُمْ فَاعْلَمُوْٓا اَنَّمَا عَلٰى رَسُوْلِنَا الْبَلٰغُ
الْمُبِيْنُ ○ (الْمَآئِدَة: ٩١، ٩٢)

"Satan, of course, would like
you to indulge in drinking and gambling
So that you may be torn by distrust and hostility
and forget your God and fail in your prayer.
Don't you dread these things?
Obey God and His Prophet and give up these habits.
However, if you persist in disobedience
then know that the Prophet
had only to communicate Our message to you." (5 : 91-92)

The believers are told in unambiguous terms that they must give up gambling and drinking which cause distrust and enmity among them and divert them from the path of God. If they do not obey the Prophet and persist in their evil ways they must accept the consequences of their decisions.

In regard to the absence of any specific punishment for drinking, it is enough to say that there are many sins for which no punishment in worldly terms is prescribed in the Quran. There is no punishment for setting up associates (*shirk*) with God, which is the gravest sin that man can commit. Historically, however, there is enough evidence to show that corporal punishment was awarded to people who were found guilty of the offence of drinking during the life of the Prophet and during the time of Hazrat Umar the punishment was enhanced.

13

On Interest

ٱلَّذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ أَمْوَٰلَهُم بِٱلَّيْلِ وَٱلنَّهَارِ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً فَلَهُمْ
أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ○
ٱلَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ ٱلرِّبَوٰا لَا يَقُومُونَ إِلَّا كَمَا يَقُومُ ٱلَّذِى
يَتَخَبَّطُهُ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ مِنَ ٱلْمَسِّ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوٓا إِنَّمَا
ٱلْبَيْعُ مِثْلُ ٱلرِّبَوٰا ۘ وَأَحَلَّ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْبَيْعَ وَحَرَّمَ ٱلرِّبَوٰا ۚ فَمَن جَآءَهُۥ
مَوْعِظَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِۦ فَٱنتَهَىٰ فَلَهُۥ مَا سَلَفَ وَأَمْرُهُۥٓ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ ۚ
وَمَنْ عَادَ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ أَصْحَٰبُ ٱلنَّارِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَٰلِدُونَ ○ يَمْحَقُ ٱللَّهُ
ٱلرِّبَوٰا وَيُرْبِى ٱلصَّدَقَٰتِ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ كَفَّارٍ أَثِيمٍ ○ إِنَّ
ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ وَأَقَامُوا ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتَوُا ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ لَهُمْ
أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ ۚ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ○
يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا ٱتَّقُوا ٱللَّهَ وَذَرُوا مَا بَقِىَ مِنَ ٱلرِّبَوٰٓا إِن
كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ○ فَإِن لَّمْ تَفْعَلُوا فَأْذَنُوا بِحَرْبٍ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ
وَرَسُولِهِۦ ۖ وَإِن تُبْتُمْ فَلَكُمْ رُءُوسُ أَمْوَٰلِكُمْ ۖ لَا تَظْلِمُونَ وَلَا
تُظْلَمُونَ ○ وَإِن كَانَ ذُو عُسْرَةٍ فَنَظِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ مَيْسَرَةٍ ۚ
وَأَن تَصَدَّقُوا خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ○ وَٱتَّقُوا يَوْمًا
تُرْجَعُونَ فِيهِ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ ۖ ثُمَّ تُوَفَّىٰ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ
لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ○ (ٱلْبَقَرَة ، ٢٧٤ – ٢٨١)

"Those who spend of their wealth day and night,
Openly and secretly,
have their reward with their God
and for them there is no fear or sorrow.

But those who exact usury
become rabid as if touched by Satan.
They delude themselves when they claim :
"After all trading is also a form of usury".
But God has forbidden usury and permitted trading.
So whosoever gives up usury after this
may retain what he may have received in the past,
and his affair will be committed to God.
But whosoever reverts to usury after this injunction
will be opting for hell where he shall stay for ever.
By His will, charity elevates while usury degrades.
God does not like ungrateful persons of evil conduct
but those who believe and follow the right path
and maintain the prayer and charity
have their reward with God
and for them there is no occasion for fear or anxiety.
O believers, fear God and write off outstanding usury if you truly believe.
But if you do not then you must know that
you are in open hostility to God and his Prophet.
So repent now and give up usury.
You are entitled to your capital.
But do not transgress and you will not be transgressed against.
If your debtor is straitened
give him time till his circumstances improve
and if you remit the loan it would be better for you.
Beware of the disgrace and torment of
the day when you will return to your God.
There everyone will receive whatever
his due for good and evil
and no injustice will be done to anyone. (2 : 274-281)

LET us first take the word *rib'a*. In Arabic the word means increase or excess and refers to that additional amount which

a lender receives from a borrower according to an agreed rate over and above the principal. The correct English equivalent is usury. There is some misunderstanding about the meaning of the word usury. Originally the word usury meant 'the fact or practice of lending money at interest'. It came to mean in later use, 'the practice of charging, taking, or contracting to receive, excessive or illegal rates of interest for money upon loan'. "The crime of usury, before Reformation consisted in the taking of any interest for the use of money; and now in taking higher rate of interest than is authorised by law". Bentham defined usury as: "I know of but two definitions that can possibly be given of usury: one is, the taking of a greater interest than the law allows of....the other is the taking of a greater interest than it is usual for men to give and take". It is clear from this that where money is loaned on interest, it amounts to usury in the original sense of the word. Subsequently laws were enacted specifying the limit within which usury was tolerated. This legal or customary limit of tolerance came to be known as interest. In the Encyclopaedia Britannica usury is explained as "compensation for the use of money regardless of amount according to earlier English law........The laws against usury are of ancient origin. Early laws of China and India prohibited usury. The Mosaic law limited the exaction of interest; the Roman Law prescribed or regulated such charges. In England during the Middle Ages the practice of charging interest was maligned by the church and outlawed by the State. But the credit requirements of modern commerce caused the removal of these restrictions in England and elsewhere". The exaction of oppressive interest is no longer illegal under the common law of England or the United States though debtors are protected from over-reaching lenders by the statute law.

The following practices of Rib'a were common when the Quran was revealed :

(*a*) A person would sell goods to another on the understanding that the price would be paid within an agreed period. If the price was not paid within that period, then an

amount was added to the price and the period of repayment was extended.

(*b*) A person would lend money to another on the understanding that a fixed additional amount would be paid beside the principal within a fixed period.

(*c*) A rate would be agreed between the borrower and the lender according to which the principal along with the additional amount would be repaid. If a further period for repayment was required, then the rate was increased for the extended period.

Those engaged in the accumulation of wealth through usury are referred to as people who are "touched by Satan". These people end up by losing all respect for human values. They convince themselves that usury and trade are the same thing. If you can make money by investing in trade, there should be no objection to your making money by lending capital. They argue that when you lend money to another he makes a profit by investing the borrowed money in some trade and pays interest to you out of his trading profit. They forget that when one invests in trade or industry or agriculture, there is an element of risk involved as the investment may not prove profitable in spite of one's best efforts. There can be no guarantee that it will yield a fixed amount of profit. A lender of capital, however, is assured of this income and is not affected by the risks involved in the investment. Let us ignore for the present the borrowing of money for unproductive purposes and the question of high and low rates of interest. Let us further assume that the borrowed amount is invested in a profitable venture and the rate of interest is reasonably low. The question is that while people who devote their labour and talent to the project in which they have invested the funds carry the entire risk of loss, the one who has loaned the capital will receive the agreed amount of interest regardless of the success or failure of the venture. This does not conform to any rational or equitable principle of economics. In the case of a person who has lent money to another person for

financing a factory, how can it be justified that the borrower should be bound to pay the lender for 20 years or so an interest of say 10 per cent per annum when it is not possible to forecast the future market price of the product. A nation engaged in war expects full support and sacrifice from the people but the one who contributes to a war loan extracts from his community a regular income on account of that loan for years after the war. There is a fundamental difference between earning the profit through trading and making money by charging interest on loaned capital.

In trading there is a reasonable division of the profit between the buyer and the seller. The seller receives a value equivalent to the time, material, labour and talent which has gone into production and the buyer derives benefit for himself from the goods or services which he receives. There is no such division or exchange between a borrower and a lender of money. The lender receives an agreed amount of money for a fixed period. He is not concerned whether the borrower makes sufficient profit to repay him his interest. If the borrowed money is spent on personal consumption or in a wasteful enterprise which might ruin the borrower it will make no difference to the title of the lender to receive the agreed amount. So in a transaction involving exchange of money, at an agreed rate of interest, the lender is assured of regular income while the borrower must assume all the risks. It is this which makes an economy based on interest an inequitable economy.

A commercial transaction, even though it may give excessive profit to one party, concludes once it has taken place. But money provided as a loan at interest establishes a continuous arrangement for repayment during the course of which the borrower may lose all his possessions in the repayment of the interest alone without being able to liquidate the principal.

A trading transaction is complete as soon as goods or services are exchanged for their price. Thereafter the buyer does not owe anything to the seller. Even where rent has to be paid for the use of land, house or goods, the original item remains intact and is returned in that state. When capital is obtained at interest it is

invested in trade or industry and the amount invested has to be recovered through production and returned to the lender along with the interest.

In any trading, industrial, or agricultural venture a person spends his time, talent and energy and makes a profit out of it. But a lender only parts with his surplus capital and thus becomes a partner in the talent and effort of others. Yet he is an unusual partner because he does not share the loss or gain in equal proportion. He receives his fixed amount whether the venture fails or succeeds.

This is what makes trading a beneficial activity which contributes to the growth of the economy while usury ruins an economy and in the end destroys all prospects of progress.

Usury appears to add to one's resources and charity subtracts from them but, in fact, usury obstructs moral, spiritual and economic growth and brings about social decline whereas charity (and this includes loans without interest) helps in the economic and social development of society.

Let us look at usury from the moral point of view. Usury encourages selfishness, miserliness, narrow-mindedness and hard-heartedness and as one pursues usury, these qualities become more pronounced. Charity results in broad-mindedness, sympathy and generosity and the more one practises charity the more these qualities are developed.

From the social point of view, usury establishes a relationship among people in which all transactions are based on personal interest. The needs of one man become a source of exploitation for another. The richer sections of society take the maximum advantage of the weakness of the less fortunate sections. Such a relationship can neither produce social stability nor mutual understanding. Instead, every member concentrates on what is in his own interest and develops a sense of jealousy and mistrust toward the others. This inevitably leads to disintegration. Where society is based on collective understanding and goodwill and people deal with one another in a fair and generous manner, helping those whose circumstances so demand, the social fabric gets strengthened. This

helps to create an environment of love, understanding and sympathy and people are able to avoid internal conflict and confrontation.

From the economic point of view there are two kinds of loans on which interest is charged: (*a*) loans which persons in need obtain for individual consumption and, (*b*) loans which professional people obtain for investment in commercial, industrial and agricultural ventures. The evils which loans of the first category produce do not have to be explained. There are individuals and institutions throughout the world who exploit the poverty of the peasants, the workers and men of low income. The weight of indebtedness becomes unbearable for them because what they earn is never sufficient to repay the interest leave alone the principal. The cumulative amount of interest that they pay far exceeds the amount which they originally borrowed. A worker finds a major part of his wages taken away by the money lender and what he is left with is inadequate even for the minimum essential needs of his family. This inevitably creates in him an attitude of disgust toward his work because the fruits of his labour are appropriated by somebody else. The worker finds himself constantly under stress and this robs him of his health which is his only real asset. While a few earn large incomes on the money advanced by them, thousands of others groan under extortion. The effect of all this is that national production always remains below the optimum level. While the rich are getting richer, the poor get poorer and more numerous until the time comes when the resentment and hatred of the masses against the privileged classes erupts and much of what is created under such an oppressive system is wiped away and the money lenders lose not only their wealth, but also their life.

The second category of loans which are meant for productive investment subject to an agreed rate of interest also give rise to innumerable problems of which the following are more significant.

All projects which cannot yield profit at least equal to the prevailing rate of interest are ignored even though they may be of immense utility and urgency for the people. National resources are diverted to such projects as can yield profit equal to or more

than the rate at which money is borrowed in the market, whether these projects are of any utility or not.

It cannot be guaranteed that a commercial, industrial or agricultural project which is financed by loan will invariably yield profit higher than the rate of interest. In fact, the possibility that the project may end up in loss cannot be ruled out. So where a businessman furnishes a guarantee under which an agreed rate of interest or profit is promised it must lead to all kinds of malpractices.

Where a person lends money for investment in a project in which he is not a partner in profit and loss but is entitled to receive a guaranteed amount as income he can hardly have any interest in the feasibility of the project. His sole anxiety would be to secure the right kind of guarantee so that the amount promised to him is either paid to him regularly or he can recover it in the event of default. If the project runs into difficulties because of market conditions he takes steps to safeguard his capital by withdrawing his funds. His selfishness can thus contribute to the market factors which may be having a depressing effect on the project and in the event of real decline in market conditions his attitude of protecting his money can bring the project to a halt.

The economic benefits of charity are obvious. If the well-to-do people after meeting their legitimate needs, in as comfortable a manner as may be reasonable, give part of their funds to people engaged in business either on loan without interest or as partners in their ventures or deposit them with the government for community services, then these funds will generate a great deal of commercial, industrial and agricultural activity. This will bring about an improvement in the living standards of the common man and the gross national product under these arrangements will be tremendously greater than that which will be produced under an economic system based on usury.

There are certain other aspects of the problem of usury which have been touched upon in Tafheemul Quran.

Ingratitude on the part of man is looked upon with disapproval.

Only those persons can indulge in money lending who have acquired more wealth than their real needs. Such a situation should be regarded by them as a favour of God and in recognition of this favour they should adopt an attitude of generosity toward their fellow beings. If they refuse to do so and part with their surplus funds only to exact whatever they can from those less favourably placed then they are being guilty of ingratitude and their conduct amounts to transgression.

There are two types of people: those who are only interested in adding to their wealth regardless of the rights of the others and those who fear God and have a sympathetic and generous attitude toward the others. They earn righteously with due regard to the rights of the others and act generously not only by helping those who are in need but also by putting funds into projects which are meant for the good of the community. Those belonging to the first category have been condemned because no society can progress with such people. Those in the second category are approved and blessed. They are the ones who help to build a progressive society and for whom there is hope and happiness in the hereafter.

The warning that people who do not give up usury will be treated as "in open hostility to God and to His prophet" was administered after the conquest of Mecca but has been placed is surah Baqarah because of its relevance to the subject. Prior to the revelation of this verse, usury was disapproved but had not been declared unlawful. With the revelation of this verse, usury became a criminal offence in the Islamic State. The Prophet, through his functionaries, conveyed to those tribes in Arabia who practised usury that if they did not give up this practice they would be treated as at war with the Government. The Christians of Najran were granted complete cultural autonomy within the Islamic State but it was specified in the agreement that if they indulged in usury the agreement would become null and void and they would be considered to be hostile to the Government. The last words of this verse have persuaded Ibne Abbas, Hasan Basari, Ibne Sairain and Rabbi-bin-Ans to conclude that in an Islamic State a person who

practises usury should first be compelled to abandon it and if he refuses to do so he should be executed. Other jurists, however, believe that such a person should be imprisoned and kept in detention till he undertakes to give up usury.

Finally there is the advice that if a debtor is in difficulties he should be given time to repay the loan. It has been inferred from this verse that an Islamic court will come to the aid of a person who is unable to repay his loans and will require his creditors to give him more time. In certain circumstances, the courts would be entitled to remit the whole or part of the loan. It is reported that a person who had incurred loss in business and was heavily under debt came to the Prophet for help. A number of people gave him monetary assistance at the instance of the Prophet but even then the amount was not enough to clear his liability. The Prophet told his creditors that they should take whatever was available and forget the rest. Scholars have suggested that a house in which a person resides, cooking utensils, personal clothing and such instruments as a person needs in his profession must under no circumstances be confiscated toward the repayment of loan.

14

The Doctrine of Abrogation

مَا نَنْسَخْ مِنْ اٰيَةٍ اَوْ نُنْسِهَا نَاْتِ بِخَيْرٍ مِّنْهَآ اَوْ مِثْلِهَا ۗ اَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ
اَنَّ اللّٰهَ عَلٰى كُلِّ شَیْءٍ قَدِيْرٌ ۝ اَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ اَنَّ اللّٰهَ لَهٗ مُلْكُ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَ
الْاَرْضِ ۗ وَمَا لَكُمْ مِّنْ دُوْنِ اللّٰهِ مِنْ وَّلِيٍّ وَّلَا نَصِيْرٍ ۝

(البقرة : ١٠٦، ١٠٧)

When We abrogate some of our injunctions
Or allow them to lapse
they are substituted
by something better or equally appropriate.
Do you not know that there is
nothing beyond His power, and
to Him belongs the dominion of
the heavens and the earth
and except Him there is no one
to protect and help you. (2 : 106-107)

This verse deals with an old controversy relating to the doctrine of abrogation. Even today readers ask whether some verses in the Quran replace others, and if this is so how does one explain the divine origin and the finality of every word contained in the Quran?

The difficulty has arisen because of misunderstanding of the meaning of two words: *Naskh* (to abrogate) and *Nisyan* (to forget).

It is explained in Tafheemul Quran* that this verse deals with

*Note 109, vol. I.

the questions which the Jews used to ask to create doubts in the minds of the believers. If the Quran is a book of divine revelations, they would ask, how can it contain anything which replaces or abrogates what was revealed earlier? How can God, who is all-knowing and all-wise, issue different orders at different times on the same subject? They also pointed out that it is said in the Quran that the Jews and the Christians forgot a part of the guidance which was given to them through the prophets of God. Is it conceivable, they asked, that divine instructions should fade from human memory? These points were raised not to understand the meanings of the Quran but to suggest to the Muslims that the Book was not of divine origin. This verse provides an answer to these two objections. There is no limit to the power of God and He may abrogate any order, amend it or allow it to lapse. Whatever is so abrogated, is always substituted by something which is either better or equally appropriate.

In commenting on this verse Abul Kalam Azad says that some religious codes continued to exist though the spirit was lost with the passage of time. In some cases the followers of a code completely lost contact with the original. In such cases it became necessary either to revive a lost code or to replace it by something better.

If the verse is read in the context of all the divine revelations it is not difficult to understand the concept of abrogation or lapse of revealed orders. The problem arises when it is applied exclusively to the verses of the Quran as some of the Western commentators have done.

What is the meaning of the word *ayah* in this verse, which has been translated as revelations. According to Abdullah Yusuf Ali, "If we take it in a general sense, it means that God's message from age to age is always the same, but that its form may differ according to the needs and exigencies of the time. That form was different as given to Moses and then to Jesus and then to Muhammad. Some commentators apply it also to the verses of the Quran. There is nothing derogatory in this if we believe in progressive revelations'..

He then goes on to explain the meanings of the word, *nisyan* :

"How many good and wise institutions gradually become obsolete by a flux of time? Then there is the gradual process of dis-use or forgetting in evolution. This does not mean that eternal principles change. It is only a sign of Allah's infinite power that His creation should take so many forms and shapes not only in the material world but in the world of man's thought and expression."

There is disagreement among authorities regarding the actual number of verses which are thought to have been abrogated. It appears that some translators of the Quran whenever they found it difficult to reconcile one verse with another decided that an earlier verse was abrogated by a later verse on the same subject. There is, however, not a single report (Hadith) tracing the abrogation of any verse to the holy Prophet.

That certain divine orders were allowed to be forgotten could not possibly refer to the Quran because there is no evidence whatever that any portion of the holy Book was forgotten. On the other hand, there is incontrovertible historical evidence that parts of the earlier revelations were lost, mutilated, or forgotten and it is those parts which have been replaced by similar or better revelations.

The word, *naskh*, also needs some explanation. The significance of one verse may be limited by another. It would then be regarded as having been abrogated (*nusikhat*) by that other. Similarly, when the words of a verse gave rise to a misconception and a later revelation cleared up that misconception, the word *naskh* was metaphorically used in connection with it, the idea underlying its use being not that the first verse was abrogated but that a certain conception to which it had given rise was abrogated. The word, *naskh*, may, therefore, be taken as an explanation which makes the significance of an *ayah* clearer. The word could not mean abrogation in the literal sense because a verse could only be abrogated by another if the two contradicted each other. "There is no discrepancy in the Quran." (4 : 82).

To conclude, the factual position regarding the number of verses affected by the doctrine of abrogation should be stated.

There are five verses about which there is some doubt. These verses are 180 and 240 in surah 2; 65 in surah 8; 52 in surah 33; and 12 in surah 58. After analysing them with great care Shah Waliullah reached the conclusion that there was no question of abrogation of any of these verses. All that has happened is that some point in an earlier verse has been clarified in a subsequent verse. It is, therefore, completely incorrect to suggest that any verse of the Quran has been cancelled or abrogated by a later verse. This does not mean that some earlier revelation has not been revived in the Quran or some point made in one verse has not been clarified or elaborated in another verse.

Part FOUR

15

The Concept of Taubah

THE Arabic word *taubah* means to return and is used to convey two distinct thoughts: man turns to God for mercy, and God turns to man in compassion. It also implies the existence of a norm of right conduct which man has violated by committing some wrong.

What is right or wrong? I ask this question not to answer it but to suggest, and this is immediately relevant to the subject, that whatever may be right or wrong and people have held different notions of it at different times, the consciousness of right and wrong is universal. You may not be able to compile a list of all that you consider right or wrong, and even if you were to do so the first man taking a look at it might put it aside as arbitrary or senseless. What is considered right in a given situation may be no better than habit or atrophied custom which we are too lazy or too self-conscious to abandon. A society might find it convenient to consign to the category of wrong all that endangers the vested interests or threatens the status-quo. Again, specific modes of right and wrong may fluctuate, even alternate, in terms of social behaviour, with the passage of time and change of environment. Yet, man has an instinct about right and wrong and it is this instinct which helps us to discriminate between good and evil. Man has developed this instinct and discrimination during the course of his development as a social being. He knows what is right even when he is engrossed in the pursuit of wrong. And in spite of variations in specific acts and practices, a moral framework or an acceptable scheme of values does exist according to which human dealings and relations are judged and regulated. This scheme is not all contained in the penal codes adopted by different communities.

Such codes, however comprehensive, can at best deal with certain types of violations and provide for punishing or preventing them. A penal code may help a person to remain on the right side of law, but no one will seriously contend that this by itself will ensure good conduct. Similarly, a person who, in the light of his convictions, openly and deliberately violates a provision of a code which he considers unjust or oppressive does not necessarily become guilty of wrong conduct. The consciousness of right and wrong is an unwritten law and represents what might be called the collective conscience of society.

The Quranic concept of *taubah* is related to this unwritten law which is not administered by any institution. A person who causes injury to another will be punished by the Islamic courts according to due process. *Taubah* cannot influence, delay, or obstruct that process. *Taubah* is not a spell or an incantation, a dispensation or a device to frustrate due process of law.

It is basic to any civilised system of law that a wrong should be established according to law before the person responsible for it is punished. What happens if a wrong is never discovered or brought to a court of law for determination? Does it cease to exist? Is the person who committed it not responsible for it? Does he have no problem or conflict within himself? Is he the same man that he was before he committed the wrong? No court of law may be seized of the matter and no one may know about it. But he knows what he has done and within him a seizure has occurred. He will hide it. He will wince involuntarily and feel exposed whenever the wrong is mentioned even without reference to him. He will try to forget it and may even remove himself from the scene but it will keep gnawing at his heart. Going over it again and again, explaining and rationalising it, he will only exhaust himself without solace. When a wrong is committed a moral situation arises for the man responsible for it and he has to resolve it in order to be able to live with himself and with the other people. This situation does not disappear if there is no judicial cognizance or determination of the wrong. Indeed, it does not disappear even

when it is so determined and the man undergoes suitable punishment for it. In the latter case social rehabilitation of the individual may become easier, but the conflict within him will continue until he can resolve it.

The problem arises because man's instinct for good and evil is violated by a transgression thereby creating a moral crisis. This crisis may be called, for convenience, the sense of guilt which is not removed by punishment alone. Punishment helps to restore order. It does not restore good. Man's consciousness of guilt is distinct from the fact of the wrong which is committed. While an offence can be objectively dealt with according to some recognised procedure regulating the administration of justice, the subjective situation requires a different treatment. It is in this context that the Quranic concept of *taubah* can be best understood. But before dealing with this concept it is necessary to state the Quranic position regarding atonement and intercession. That some one else can carry our burden of sin, in addition to his own, finds no acceptance in the Quran. That some one can intercede on our behalf is also ruled out except for a limited purpose under specific conditions.

16

Repentance and Reparation

ATONEMENT in Christian theology means the reconciliation of God and man by means of the incarnation and death of Christ. This has no place in the Quran where every individual is finally accountable for his own acts. There is no ritual of appeasement, reparation or expiation in Islam. The only act directly connected with the redemption of a wrong is *Qissas*. This word has been translated as 'law of equality' by Abdullah Yusuf Ali and as 'retaliation' by Rodwell. I prefer the word reparation.

Let us see how the concept of *Qissas* is described in the Quran.

وَكَتَبْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ فِيهَآ أَنَّ النَّفْسَ بِالنَّفْسِ وَالْعَيْنَ بِالْعَيْنِ
وَالْأَنْفَ بِالْأَنْفِ وَالْأُذُنَ بِالْأُذُنِ وَالسِّنَّ بِالسِّنِّ وَ
الْجُرُوحَ قِصَاصٌ فَمَنْ تَصَدَّقَ بِهِ فَهُوَ كَفَّارَةٌ لَّهُ وَ
مَنْ لَّمْ يَحْكُمْ بِمَآ أَنْزَلَ اللهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّٰلِمُونَ ○
(الْمَآئِدَة : ٤٥)

"In the Torah We inscribed a Commandment for the Jews : Life for life, eye for eye, nose for nose, ear for ear, tooth for tooth and equal injury for all injuries.

But he who foregoes the right of retaliation out of charity is atoned.

And those who do not judge according to the divine law are transgressors indeed." (5 : 45)

In surah 17, verse 33 reads :

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ ۗ وَمَن قُتِلَ مَظْلُومًا
فَقَدْ جَعَلْنَا لِوَلِيِّهِ سُلْطَانًا فَلَا يُسْرِف فِّي الْقَتْلِ ۖ إِنَّهُ كَانَ
مَنصُورًا ۝ (بنی اسرآءیل : ۳۳)

"It is forbidden by God that you should kill a human being except when it is justified.
And if a person is killed wrongfully his heir is entitled to reparation
but not beyond reasonable limit and in this he will be helped."

Verses 178 and 179 in surah 2 read :

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِصَاصُ فِي الْقَتْلَى ۖ الْحُرُّ
بِالْحُرِّ وَالْعَبْدُ بِالْعَبْدِ وَالْأُنثَىٰ بِالْأُنثَىٰ ۚ فَمَنْ عُفِيَ لَهُ مِنْ
أَخِيهِ شَيْءٌ فَاتِّبَاعٌ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَأَدَاءٌ إِلَيْهِ بِإِحْسَانٍ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ
تَخْفِيفٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ ۗ فَمَنِ اعْتَدَىٰ بَعْدَ ذَٰلِكَ فَلَهُ
عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ۝ وَلَكُمْ فِي الْقِصَاصِ حَيَاةٌ يَا أُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ۝ (البقرة : ۱۷۸، ۱۷۹)

"O, Believers, reparation is ordained for murder ;
The free for the free,
the slave for the slave,
and the female for the female.
However, if an aggrieved person is charitable toward the culprit the matter should be compounded according to common usage.
The amount awarded should be honestly paid.
This is in mitigation of the crime and a favour from God.
Whoever exceeds the limit after this will incur awful punishment.
There is security for you in the law of reparation, O men of understanding.
Hopefully, you will restrain yourself."

The law of reparation applies to cases of murder alone and its purpose is to establish security. Compensation is permitted in mitigation of the crime as a favour from God. In respect of other wrongs and offences the law of reparation is of no avail.

The Quranic injuctions relating to atonement (*kaffara*), sacrifice (*qurbani*) and charity (*sadaqa*) show that these are not acts of reparation but virtues which carry their own reward. They are not offerings to God in expiation of one's sins.*

'*Kaffara*' is not a fine but a form of penance. Payment of fine is rarely accompanied by any regret, nor does it imply any desire to reform oneself. Indeed, the payment of fine is often the result of compulsion which creates a sense of bitterness and disgust. '*Kaffara*' literally means 'something with which you conceal'. Something good done in the spirit of '*kaffara*' covers an evil act just as a black spot on a wall is covered by a white coating."

'*Kaffara*' is offered in certain situations e.g., those involving violation of oaths. It encourages humility, discipline and charity.

فَكَفَّارَتُهُ إِطْعَامُ عَشَرَةِ مَسَاكِينَ مِنْ أَوْسَطِ مَا تُطْعِمُونَ أَهْلِيكُمْ (المائدة : ۸۹)

"To atone for a pledge you have violated you must feed ten poor people in the same way as you feed your family". (5 : 89).

Obviously, if the violation of the pledge has caused injury to another the feeding of ten people will have no bearing on the offence or its punishment.

Similarly, sacrifice is not a form of reparation. It is a form of prayer.

لَنْ يَنَالَ اللَّهَ لُحُومُهَا وَلَا دِمَاؤُهَا وَلَٰكِنْ يَنَالُهُ التَّقْوَىٰ مِنْكُمْ (الحج : ۳۷)

"It is the act of piety in making a sacrifice that pleases God.

*Tafheemul_Quran, page 383, Vol. I.

Not the flesh and blood of the animal which is sacrificed."
(22 : 37).

In surah 108, verses 1 to 3, prayer and sacrifice are mentioned together :

إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ ۝ فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَانْحَرْ ۝ إِنَّ شَانِئَكَ
هُوَ الْأَبْتَرُ ۝ (الكوثر، ١-٣)

"O, Prophet, We grant you bounties unlimited
so turn to your God in prayer and sacrifice.
It is your detractors who stand curtailed."

And foregoing *sadaqa* means a willing surrender of one's claim. This is explained in surah 5, verse 45, relating to '*Qissas*' quoted earlier. The relevant portion is "but he who foregoes the right of retaliation out of charity is atoned"? The essential element here is charity toward others rather than atonement for oneself.

No ceremony or ritual is prescribed in the Quran to propitiate God. The very word propitiate conjures up the image of a power malevolently disposed toward man, whereas God is most forgiving and compassionate. He does not have to be appeased. His sole concern is that man should avoid evil which brings him pain, and pursue good which brings him happiness and leads him to eternal bliss.

17

Final Accountability for Actions

THE idea of intercession is alien to the Quranic concept that every individual is personally responsible and finally accountable for his actions :

وَاتَّقُوا يَوْمًا لَّا تَجْزِي نَفْسٌ عَن نَّفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَلَا يُقْبَلُ مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ وَ
لَا تَنفَعُهَا شَفَاعَةٌ وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ ○ (البقرة : ١٢٣)

"Prepare for the Day when you will answer for yourself.
Neither compensation nor intercession will avail,
Nor will any help be forthcoming." (2 : 123)

The same surah, verse 255, contains a stern statement :

مَن ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِندَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ ؕ (البقرة : ٢٥٥)

"Who can have the courage to intercede with Him without His permission?"

"This is a refutation of the view that certain pious personages, angels and other entities have a great say in divine affairs and that they can influence divine decisions if they instist. Leave alone insistence not even a prophet or an angel dare utter a word in the presence of the Lord of the universe without His permission."*

In surah 9, verse 80, the Prophet is told in no uncertain terms that even his pleading will not help those who had acted arrogantly

*Note 281, page 194, Tafheemul Quran.

and hypocritically on the eve of Tobuk:

اِسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ اَوْ لَا تَسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ ۚ اِنْ تَسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ سَبْعِيْنَ مَرَّةً فَلَنْ يَّغْفِرَ اللّٰهُ لَهُمْ ۚ (التوبة : ٨٠)

"O, Prophet, there is no forgiveness for them,
even if you were to plead for them seventy times,
God will not forgive them."

When Noah prays for his son be gets the following answer :

قَالَ يٰنُوْحُ اِنَّهٗ لَيْسَ مِنْ اَهْلِكَ ۚ اِنَّهٗ عَمَلٌ غَيْرُ صَالِحٍ ۖ فَلَا تَسْـَٔلْنِ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهٖ عِلْمٌ ۚ اِنِّيْٓ اَعِظُكَ اَنْ تَكُوْنَ مِنَ الْجٰهِلِيْنَ ۝ (هود : ٤٦)

"O, Noah! He does not belong to you,
His is a lost cause.
Ask not what you do not understand.
And act not in ignorance". (11 : 46).

Since man is personally responsible for his actions, how can others either share his responsibility or relieve him of the consequences of his actions? It is ignorance or weakness which compels a person in distress to turn to others for help. Such help cannot alter the course of events or neutralize the effects of one's deeds :

وَيَعْبُدُوْنَ مِنْ دُوْنِ اللّٰهِ مَا لَا يَضُرُّهُمْ وَلَا يَنْفَعُهُمْ وَيَقُوْلُوْنَ هٰٓؤُلَاۤءِ شُفَعَاۤؤُنَا عِنْدَ اللّٰهِ ۗ (يونس : ١٨)

"And they worship those, other than God,
who can neither help nor harm them.
They think they can intercede with God on their behalf".
(10 : 18).

A little earlier in the same surah it is said in verse 3 :

إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ
ثُمَّ اسْتَوٰى عَلَى الْعَرْشِ يُدَبِّرُ الْأَمْرَ ۖ مَا مِنْ شَفِيعٍ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ
إِذْنِهِ ۚ ذٰلِكُمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُوهُ ۚ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ ○
(يُونُس : ٣)

"The truth is that your God is the one
who created the heavens and the earth in six days.
He occupies the throne.
And conducts the affais of the universe.
No one can intercede in any matter
except with His permission.
He is your creator and sustainer.
Worship Him if you are mindful". (10 : 3)

The Quran firmly rejects the idea that anyone can intercede on behalf of the others. Man stands alone and he must know that he alone is answerable for all that he does.

وَلَقَدْ جِئْتُمُونَا فُرَادٰى كَمَا خَلَقْنٰكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَّتَرَكْتُمْ مَّا خَوَّلْنٰكُمْ
وَرَاءَ ظُهُورِكُمْ ۖ وَمَا نَرٰى مَعَكُمْ شُفَعَاءَكُمُ الَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُمْ أَنَّهُمْ
فِيكُمْ شُرَكٰٓؤُا ۚ لَقَدْ تَّقَطَّعَ بَيْنَكُمْ وَضَلَّ عَنْكُمْ مَّا كُنْتُمْ تَزْعُمُونَ ○
(الْأَنْعَام : ٩٤)

"There you return to us
all by yourself,
Alone, as born at first.
Whatever you had is now behind you.
Nowhere to be seen are those to whom you attributed
your success and well-being in the past.
All ties are snapped
and those on whom you depended have vanished". (6 : 94)

This is the moment of truth which man must face.

وَيَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ الْجِبَالِ فَقُلْ يَنسِفُهَا رَبِّي نَسْفًا ﴿١٠٥﴾ فَيَذَرُهَا
قَاعًا صَفْصَفًا ﴿١٠٦﴾ لَّا تَرَىٰ فِيهَا عِوَجًا وَلَا أَمْتًا ﴿١٠٧﴾ يَوْمَئِذٍ
يَتَّبِعُونَ الدَّاعِيَ لَا عِوَجَ لَهُ ۖ وَخَشَعَتِ الْأَصْوَاتُ لِلرَّحْمَٰنِ
فَلَا تَسْمَعُ إِلَّا هَمْسًا ﴿١٠٨﴾ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَّا تَنفَعُ الشَّفَاعَةُ إِلَّا مَنْ
أَذِنَ لَهُ الرَّحْمَٰنُ وَرَضِيَ لَهُ قَوْلًا ﴿١٠٩﴾ (طٰه: ١٠٥-١٠٩)

"Where will the mountains go?" they ask you,
Tell them, my Lord will scatter them as dust.
Not a hollow or a crease will be seen
and the whole earth will be flattened-into plain ground on that Day.
Everyone will walk up humbly in response to the call.
There will be no trace of arrogance and
voices will be all subdued in His presence.
You will hear nothing but a vast hum on that Day.
No intercession will be possible
except by one whom God permits
and whose words He approves". (20 : 105-109).

Again in surah 82, verses 18 and 19 say :

ثُمَّ مَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمُ الدِّينِ ﴿١٨﴾ يَوْمَ لَا تَمْلِكُ نَفْسٌ لِّنَفْسٍ شَيْئًا ۖ وَالْأَمْرُ
يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلَّهِ ﴿١٩﴾ (الانفطار: ١٨-١٩)

"Do you know of the Day of Requital?
No, you cannot even visualize it.
No one will be able to help another on that Day.

The judgement will rest entirely with God".

In surah 4 the Prophet is enjoined not to support the

transgressors.

إِنَّآ أَنزَلْنَآ إِلَيْكَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ بِٱلْحَقِّ لِتَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ ٱلنَّاسِ بِمَآ أَرَىٰكَ
ٱللَّهُ ۚ وَلَا تَكُن لِّلْخَآئِنِينَ خَصِيمًا ○ وَٱسْتَغْفِرِ ٱللَّهَ ۖ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ
كَانَ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا ○ وَلَا تُجَٰدِلْ عَنِ ٱلَّذِينَ يَخْتَانُونَ
أَنفُسَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ مَن كَانَ خَوَّانًا أَثِيمًا ○ يَسْتَخْفُونَ
مِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ وَلَا يَسْتَخْفُونَ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ وَهُوَ مَعَهُمْ إِذْ يُبَيِّتُونَ
مَا لَا يَرْضَىٰ مِنَ ٱلْقَوْلِ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ مُحِيطًا ○
هَٰٓأَنتُمْ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ جَٰدَلْتُمْ عَنْهُمْ فِى ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا فَمَن يُجَٰدِلُ
ٱللَّهَ عَنْهُمْ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ أَم مَّن يَكُونُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَكِيلًا ○
وَمَن يَعْمَلْ سُوٓءًا أَوْ يَظْلِمْ نَفْسَهُۥ ثُمَّ يَسْتَغْفِرِ ٱللَّهَ يَجِدِ
ٱللَّهَ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا ○ وَمَن يَكْسِبْ إِثْمًا فَإِنَّمَا يَكْسِبُهُۥ عَلَىٰ
نَفْسِهِۦ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا ○ (النساء: ١٠٥-١١١)

"O, Prophet, We have revealed
to you this Book of truth.
Judge among men in its light.
Contend not for the dishonest.
Seek God's mercy,
He is most forgiving and compassionate.
Support not those who are untrue to themselves.
God does not approve of people
who are sinful and violate the trust reposed in them.
They can hide what they do from men
but not from God.
He knows what they conspire against His will
under cover of darkness and
He encompasses all their deeds.
Even if you did plead their cause here
who will speak for them in the hereafter?
They will find no advocate there.

Whoever commits a sin or wrongs his soul
and turns to God for mercy will find Him
compassionate and forgiving.
The consequences of his transgression he must bear himself.
God is all knowing and wisest." (4 : 105-111)

The above quotation sums up the Quranic position regarding intercession and atonement and brings out the following points:

(*i*) Even the Prophet (peace be upon him) is not expected to plead for those of whom God does not approve.

(*ii*) God is all knowing and most forgiving. Everyone must turn to Him for mercy.

(*iii*) Man may imagine that he can get help from others in this world. He will find no advocate on the Day of Judgement.

(*iv*) Every individual must bear the consequences of his transgressions.

It was mentioned earlier that intercession under certain conditions is envisaged in the Quran. These conditions are contained in surah 2, verse 255; surah 4, verse 109; surah 10, verse 3; surah 20, verse 109 :

(*a*) one permitted to speak by God may intercede on behalf of another, and

(*b*) any submission to be made must be true and should be approved by God.

This clearly shows that intercession is envisaged in the Quran as an exception, available on the Day of Judgement to one specially permitted to speak and limited to words of truth approved by God.

يَوْمَ يَقُومُ الرُّوحُ وَالْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ صَفًّا ۖ لَّا يَتَكَلَّمُونَ إِلَّا مَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ
الرَّحْمَٰنُ وَقَالَ صَوَابًا ○ (النَّبَا ، ٣٨)

"All the angels and spirits will be arrayed on that Day.
None will speak
except the one who is permitted by God
and utters the truth". (78 : 38)

The one permitted to speak may be the person himself and not necessarily someone on his behalf. To my understanding the exception relating to intercession emphasises the rule that every individual is held personally responsible and is directly judged according to the Quran. There is no intermediary between man and God. The Prophet is responsible for communicating the message of God. He is not answerable for the conduct of the recipients of the message. The question of anybody interceding on behalf of another does not arise. The one who intercedes could not be in possession of a fact unknown to God. Nor can one entertain the view that someone could be more interested in the welfare of a person than God. Surely He being the most knowing, the most compassionate would not require any recommendation or intervention to forgive someone deserving of His Mercy.

18

Taubah: An Intimate, Personal Act

Having discussed different aspects of atonement and intercession we can now turn, once again, to the Quranic concept of *taubah* which is essentially an intimate, personal act. Indeed, it is more than an act. It reflects a moment of decision when one makes up one's mind to break with a course of action and to simultaneously adopt another course.

Taubah is not merely the negation of the past; it is also a contract for the future. *Taubah* is personal in that no one else need know about it. You do not have to go into a confessional to make a clean breast of all your sins, nor do you have to appear in sack-cloth and ashes to convince any authority that you haev truly turned penitent. While punishment relates to the *act* of wrong and satisfies the social conscience, *taubah* deals with the *wrongness* of the act and satisfies the conscience of the individual concerned. The wrongness continues even after the act has been determined and punished. *Taubah* is the result of man's understanding of the wrongness of an act and his determination not to repeat the act. Once he has come to this decision he turns to God for mercy and forgiveness. God knows His creatures more than anyone eles. He is aware of man's weaknesses. How quickly does man succumb to temptation! But for God's guidance he would stumble at every step. So when man turns to God in repentance he finds Him most considerate and most merciful.

This process of repentance and forgiveness started with Adam.

There is the whole history of it in surah 20, verse 115 :

وَلَقَدْ عَهِدْنَآ إِلَىٰٓ ءَادَمَ مِن قَبْلُ فَنَسِىَ وَلَمْ نَجِدْ لَهُۥ عَزْمًا ۝

(طٰـٰه ، ١١٥)

"Before this We made a Covenant with Adam.
But he forgot his part.
He was of poor resolve!"

Man often forgets his part of the contract and fails in his resolve. God is ever willing to renew the contract. It is for man to avail himself of God's mercy and this he can do by entering into a fresh resolve with a clear determination to honour his part of the contract. When Adam violated the Covenant he found himself exposed. He desperately tried to cover himself but was transxfied, as it were, by a cosmic eye. In mute helplessness he turned to God for mercy :

فَتَلَقَّىٰٓ ءَادَمُ مِن رَّبِّهِۦ كَلِمَٰتٍ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلتَّوَّابُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ۝

(البقرة ، ٣٠)

"Adam then sought forgiveness in the words he learnt from God
Who turned to Him in compassion and granted him reprieve.
He is most compassionate and forgiving". (2 : 37)

When Adam realized that he had violated the Covenant he was in anguish and longed to return to the path of obedience. He had an overwhelming urge to seek forgiveness from God but could not express himself. God turned to him in compassion and taught him the words of repentance. The original meaning of the word, *taubah* is to revert or turn back. For man, *taubah* means that he abandons the course of defiance and reverts to obedience. In relation to God *taubah* means that He reverts to a penitent person and extends to him His mercy.

The verses which I have just quoted bring out two aspects of man's character: (1) inherently weak resolve, and (2) a strong urge to make amends. When a person repents he does not explain his conduct. He says, "admittedly I have committed a wrong but given an opportunity I shall make amends".

In this sense *taubah* means asking for an opportunity to prove oneself. And this is how *taubah* becomes a contract for the future.

I now present the Quranic concept of repentance by referring to the relevant verses. I have tried to follow, as far as possible, the order in which they were revealed.

Surah 25, verses 70-71 describe how one will be punished for one's sins and then refer to the exception.

إِلَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا فَأُولَٰئِكَ يُبَدِّلُ اللّٰهُ سَيِّاٰتِهِمْ
حَسَنٰتٍ ۗ وَكَانَ اللّٰهُ غَفُوْرًا رَّحِيْمًا ۝ وَمَنْ تَابَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا
فَإِنَّهُ يَتُوْبُ إِلَى اللّٰهِ مَتَابًا ۝ (الفرقان: ٧٠، ٧١)

"Except those who repent and adopt faith and right conduct.
The past of such people shall be transformed into good,
for God is most merciful.
One who repents and acts righteously
truly reverts to God".

"This is a message of hope for those whose past may be replete with sins but who are prepared to reform themselves. This message came as a declaration of general amnesty which saved millions of people in the depraved Arab society of the time. It kindled a spark of light and guided them to the right path. Had they been told that punishment for their sins was inevitable and they could not escape their past they would have been plunged into a bottomless pit of evil from which there would have been no recovery. Remission and hope of forgiveness alone can extricate a man from the vicious circle of

sin. Once he loses hope he turns into a veritable devil".*

There were several incidents during the time of the holy Prophet (peace be on him) which illustrate the profound effect of *taubah* on the life of persons who had gone astray. As related by Ibne Jarir Hazrat Abu Huraira said: "I had just finished my *isha* prayers in the masjid-e-nabavi when I saw a woman at the door. I saluted her and went into my room closing the door behind me. After a while she knocked at the door. I opened the door and enquired, "what do you want"? "I have come to ask you a question", she said and added "I committed adultery and conceived. I killed the child at birth. Is there any hope of forgiveness for me"? "None whatsoever". I answered and closed the door. She went away in distress, saying, "How terrible! was this beauty meant for the flames?"

I reported this incident to the Prophet the next day after the morning prayers. "Your answer was completely wrong Abu Huraira" said the Prophet: "Do you not know the verse that those who repent and adopt the right conduct find their past transformed into good?" I went out in search of the woman. I found her late in the evening and told her what the Prophet had said. She was overwhelmed with joy and thanked God for showing her the way to forgiveness. She freed her slave girl and her son and offered sincere *taubah*."

There is another incident quoted by Ibne-Kaseer of an old man who came to the Prophet and said: "There is hardly a sin I have not committed. My life has been a life of indulgence. Were I to distribute my sins among men they would collapse under their weight. Is there still any hope for me"? The Prophet enquired. "Do you believe in God"? "I do", he answered, "there is no god but Him and Muhammad is His Prophet". "Remember", said the Prophet, "God is most merciful and forgiving. He can change your life into a life of good. So, despair not".

*Note 86, surah 25, Tafheemul Quran.

19

Taubah : The Quality of a Believer

THE concept of *taubah* is based on (*i*) the recognition of man's weakness which exposes him to temptation and (*ii*) the availability of opportunities to man to reform himself. *Taubah* becomes meaningful when man avails himself of those opportunities and undertakes to make amends by his conduct. Surah 16, verse 119 says :

ثُمَّ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لِلَّذِينَ عَمِلُوا السُّوءَ بِجَهَالَةٍ ثُمَّ تَابُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَٰلِكَ وَأَصْلَحُوا إِنَّ رَبَّكَ مِنْ بَعْدِهَا لَغَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ (النحل ١١٩)

"Surely, those who transgressed out of ignorance,
and after repentance reformed their conduct,
found God merciful and gracious.

The word ignorance means not just lack of knowledge but also improper understanding. One may be led into an erroneous or wrongful course of action due to faulty reasoning, poor appreciation of facts relevant to a decision, and failure to maintain a balance between the means and the end, between reason and emotions or between self-interest and social interests. The plea of ignorance ceases to be relevant when man, having come to realise his error, deliberately persists in it.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بَعْدَ إِيمَانِهِمْ ثُمَّ ازْدَادُوا كُفْرًا لَّن تُقْبَلَ تَوْبَتُهُمْ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الضَّالُّونَ (آل عمران ٩٠)

"But those who turn away

after they have come to believe
and grow in disbelief
must know that their repentance is futile.
They are confirmed in sin." (3 : 90)

Nations, like individuals, commit themselves to pursuits which result in their destruction. They too are given warnings and offered opportunities to reform themselves.

وَإِلَىٰ عَادٍ أَخَاهُمْ هُودًا ۚ قَالَ يَٰقَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُم مِّنْ
إِلَٰهٍ غَيْرُهُ ۖ إِنْ أَنتُمْ إِلَّا مُفْتَرُونَ ○ يَٰقَوْمِ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ
أَجْرًا ۖ إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَى الَّذِي فَطَرَنِي ۚ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ○ وَيَٰقَوْمِ
اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ ثُمَّ تُوبُوا إِلَيْهِ يُرْسِلِ السَّمَاءَ عَلَيْكُم مِّدْرَارًا وَ
يَزِدْكُمْ قُوَّةً إِلَىٰ قُوَّتِكُمْ وَلَا تَتَوَلَّوْا مُجْرِمِينَ ○

(هُود : ٥٠-٥٢)

"And We sent to Aad their brother Hud.
Turn to God, he said,
you have no god but Him
the rest are mere figments of your imagination.
I want nothing from you.
My reward is with the One who created me.
Use your mind and ask for forgiveness.
Turn to Him
and He will open the skies to you in their abundance
and you will grow from strength to strength.
Do not turn away like culprits." (11: 50-52)

Note 57 in Tafheemul Quran under this verse (Vol. II, page 346) says :

> "This is the same thing which the Prophet was called upon to say in the first section of this surah : 'Ask forgiveness of your God and turn to Him. He will give you the good things of life".

The rise and fall of nations depends on moral factors. Divine control of the universe rests on ethical foundations and not on abstract laws devoid of moral content. It is repeatedly mentioned in the Quran that the fortunes of a people become subservient to the message of God after it is delivered to them through a prophet. If they obey, they are blessed; if they defy, they are discarded. It is like a provision of the moral code which God applies to human affairs.

Another provision of this code is that a nation, when it is misguided by its affluence and power and adopts oppressive ways, is bound to come a cropper. But even as it is hurrying to a dismal end should it realise its mistake and abandon the path of defiance, reverting humbly to God, it will find its situation dramatically altered. Its tenure will expand and a dark future of fear and disgrace will be illumined by hope, dignity and progress.

In the same surah, verse 90 gives the assurance :

وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ ثُمَّ تُوبُوا إِلَيْهِ ۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي رَحِيمٌ وَدُودٌ ○

(هُود ، ٩٠)

"Look! seek forgiveness and revert to Him,
for my God is without doubt merciful
and loves what He creates."

God is not callous. Nor is He hostile to His creatures that He should want to punish them. It is only when man exceeds all limits and creates disorder that he is castigated. God's mercy is all embracing and His love for the people is infinite. Whenever man turns to Him for forgiveness he finds Him ever willing to extend His compassion to him.

Taubah and forgiveness are administered under God's mercy which is described in the Quran as a law. Addressing the Prophet

it is said in surah 6, verse 54 :

وَإِذَا جَاءَكَ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِآيَاتِنَا فَقُلْ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ كَتَبَ
رَبُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ أَنَّهُ مَنْ عَمِلَ مِنْكُمْ سُوءًا بِجَهَالَةٍ
ثُمَّ تَابَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَنَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ○
(الأنعام: ٥٤)

"When those who want to believe
approach you, pray for them.
God has prescribed even for Himself the Law of Mercy.
He turns in kindness to those
who repent and undertake to make amends."

The operation of this law is beautifully expressed in surah 3, verses 86-89 and 130-143 :

كَيْفَ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ قَوْمًا كَفَرُوا بَعْدَ إِيمَانِهِمْ وَشَهِدُوا أَنَّ
الرَّسُولَ حَقٌّ وَجَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ ۚ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ
الظَّالِمِينَ ○ أُولَٰئِكَ جَزَاؤُهُمْ أَنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ لَعْنَةَ اللَّهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ
وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ ○ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمُ الْعَذَابُ وَ
لَا هُمْ يُنْظَرُونَ ○ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَٰلِكَ وَأَصْلَحُوا
فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ○ (آل عمران: ٨٦-٨٩)

"How could they expect guidance
after they went back on their faith
though they were themselves witness to
the truth of the Prophet's mission
and received undeniable proof of it.
Those who transgress deserve no guidance.
For their transgression
they must remain under the curse of God, His angels
and all mankind without respite or remission.
Yet those who repent and reform themselves will be saved.

God is most compassionate and merciful".

يٰٓاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا لَا تَاْكُلُوا الرِّبٰوٓا اَضْعَافًا مُّضٰعَفَةً ۠ وَّاتَّقُوا
اللّٰهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُوْنَ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا النَّارَ الَّتِيْٓ اُعِدَّتْ لِلْكٰفِرِيْنَ ۚ وَاَطِيْعُوا
اللّٰهَ وَالرَّسُوْلَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُوْنَ ۚ وَسَارِعُوْٓا اِلٰى مَغْفِرَةٍ
مِّنْ رَّبِّكُمْ وَجَنَّةٍ عَرْضُهَا السَّمٰوٰتُ وَالْاَرْضُ ۙ اُعِدَّتْ
لِلْمُتَّقِيْنَ ۙ الَّذِيْنَ يُنْفِقُوْنَ فِي السَّرَّآءِ وَالضَّرَّآءِ وَالْكٰظِمِيْنَ
الْغَيْظَ وَالْعَافِيْنَ عَنِ النَّاسِ ۗ وَاللّٰهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِيْنَ ۚ وَ
الَّذِيْنَ اِذَا فَعَلُوْا فَاحِشَةً اَوْ ظَلَمُوْٓا اَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللّٰهَ
فَاسْتَغْفَرُوْا لِذُنُوْبِهِمْ ۠ وَمَنْ يَّغْفِرُ الذُّنُوْبَ اِلَّا اللّٰهُ ۠ وَلَمْ
يُصِرُّوْا عَلٰى مَا فَعَلُوْا وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُوْنَ ۝ اُولٰٓئِكَ جَزَآؤُهُمْ
مَّغْفِرَةٌ مِّنْ رَّبِّهِمْ وَجَنّٰتٌ تَجْرِيْ مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْاَنْهٰرُ
خٰلِدِيْنَ فِيْهَا ۗ وَنِعْمَ اَجْرُ الْعٰمِلِيْنَ ۗ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ
سُنَنٌ ۙ فَسِيْرُوْا فِي الْاَرْضِ فَانْظُرُوْا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ
الْمُكَذِّبِيْنَ ۝ هٰذَا بَيَانٌ لِّلنَّاسِ وَهُدًى وَّمَوْعِظَةٌ
لِّلْمُتَّقِيْنَ ۝ وَلَا تَهِنُوْا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوْا وَاَنْتُمُ الْاَعْلَوْنَ اِنْ
كُنْتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِيْنَ ۝ اِنْ يَّمْسَسْكُمْ قَرْحٌ فَقَدْ مَسَّ الْقَوْمَ قَرْحٌ
مِّثْلُهٗ ۗ وَتِلْكَ الْاَيَّامُ نُدَاوِلُهَا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ ۚ وَلِيَعْلَمَ اللّٰهُ
الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا وَيَتَّخِذَ مِنْكُمْ شُهَدَآءَ ۗ وَاللّٰهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظّٰلِمِيْنَ ۙ
وَلِيُمَحِّصَ اللّٰهُ الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا وَيَمْحَقَ الْكٰفِرِيْنَ ۝ اَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ
اَنْ تَدْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَعْلَمِ اللّٰهُ الَّذِيْنَ جٰهَدُوْا مِنْكُمْ وَ
يَعْلَمَ الصّٰبِرِيْنَ ۝ وَلَقَدْ كُنْتُمْ تَمَنَّوْنَ الْمَوْتَ مِنْ قَبْلِ
اَنْ تَلْقَوْهُ ۠ فَقَدْ رَاَيْتُمُوْهُ وَاَنْتُمْ تَنْظُرُوْنَ ۝

(اٰل عمرٰن : ١٣٠ - ١٤٣)

"O, Believers abjure usury,
and serve God so that you may be reprieved.
Beware of the fire intended for the disbelievers.
Obey God and His Prophet to deserve mercy.
Hasten to the path which leads to God's forgiveness
and to paradise, vast as the heavens and the earth
meant for those who fulfil their obligations,
act generously, whether they be rich or poor,
and control their passions and pardon others.
Such men are God's favourites.
If ever they transgress or put themselves in the wrong
they remember God instantly and seek His forgiveness.
They know that He alone can condone
and they do not persist in error.
Such men obtain forgiveness and find
a lasting abode in gardens with rivers flowing underneath.
Excellent is the recompense for good.
Grieve not and do not lose hope.
It is you who must win in the end
if you are true to your faith.
You are hurt now but so was your adversary earlier.
These are the ups and downs
of life which alternate among men.
You were subjected to this test because
God wanted the Believers among you to be identified
and to select those who could stand by truth.
He does not approve of those who transgress.
Through this test He has identified the believers
and eliminated the disbelievers.
Do you really think you can attain eternal bliss
without going through any trial or tribulation?
It will be seen who among you can endure patiently
and lay down his life in the way of God.
There was a time when you desired death
but then it was not imminent.

Now go forward, it is there staring you in the face".
(3 : 130-143).

The view that the consequences of sin are unavoidable and man must suffer the punishment for his lapses is rejected by the Quran. Such a view is misleading as it excludes all possibility of improvement or redemption. Having once erred should man despair for ever? Assuming that he genuinely strives to reform himself would his past cling to him like an albatross? According to the Quran requital is in God's discretion. When efforts in the pursuit of good materialise it is because of God's grace and not the result of some natural law. Similarly, the punishment for sin is also in His discretion. He forgives when He wills and whom He wills. But divine discretion is not exercised aimlessly. God sees not only the outward action but the inner motive too. The failure of a good deed may, in fact, be the failure of intention. A seemingly evil act committed not in defiance but in ignorance and followed by sincere regret may not incur any punishment. All acts, good or bad, are shaped by intentions and motives. God determines their consequences in His wisdom. Even a confirmed sinner and a profligate need not lose hope provided he sincerely regrets, transgresses no more, and returns to the right path in humility and devotion.

20

Act of True Repentance

REPENTANCE must occur while there is still time to make amends and amends must be made by deeds not by words. Repentance offered at the last moment might ease the pain of death but it is no more than a ritual. Repentance is relevant when man's capacities are still intact and he can choose between good and evil. The door of repentance does not open on the threshold of death.

إِنَّمَا التَّوْبَةُ عَلَى اللَّهِ لِلَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ السُّوءَ بِجَهَالَةٍ ثُمَّ
يَتُوبُونَ مِن قَرِيبٍ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَتُوبُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ
عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا ○ وَلَيْسَتِ التَّوْبَةُ لِلَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ
السَّيِّئَاتِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدَهُمُ الْمَوْتُ قَالَ إِنِّي تُبْتُ
الْآنَ وَلَا الَّذِينَ يَمُوتُونَ وَهُمْ كُفَّارٌ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ أَعْتَدْنَا لَهُمْ
عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا ○

(النساء ٤: ١٧، ١٨)

"Repentance is only for those who err in ignorance,
and lose no time in making amends.
God is all-knowing and He turns to such people in mercy.
But those who persist in evil
until death overtakes them
and then repent merit no consideration.
Nor do those who reject faith till the every end.
There is awful punishment for such people." (4: 17-18)

"Take the example of a servant who turns away from his master in defiance and returns to him in remorse. The master

takes a compassionate view and accepts him back in service. This is the process of repentance. In this verse it is clarified that this arrangement extends only to those who err not blatantly and deliberately but out of ignorance. The moment they realize their mistake they retrace their steps and seek forgiveness. Such people, whenever they return to the right path, find the doors of forgiveness wide open. These doors do not shut out hope. All your lapses notwithstanding, return when you will."*

To expect that one should be able to repent when one is dying after a life of indulgence makes nonsense of repentance. The Prophet said, "God accepts repentance before the signs of death set in". How does one make amends in this life after it is over? Similarly, if one persists in disbelief throughout one's life and awakens to truth on the other side of death one gives oneself no chance for repentance.

Repentance helps man to regain his inner light which is the source of guidance. The purer the repentance, the clearer the light.

يٰٓاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا تُوْبُوْٓا اِلَى اللّٰهِ تَوْبَةً نَّصُوْحًا ۭ
عَسٰى رَبُّكُمْ اَنْ يُّكَفِّرَ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّاٰتِكُمْ وَيُدْخِلَكُمْ
جَنّٰتٍ تَجْرِيْ مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْاَنْهٰرُ ۙ يَوْمَ لَا يُخْزِي اللّٰهُ
النَّبِيَّ وَالَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا مَعَهٗ ۚ نُوْرُهُمْ يَسْعٰى بَيْنَ
اَيْدِيْهِمْ وَبِاَيْمَانِهِمْ يَقُوْلُوْنَ رَبَّنَآ اَتْمِمْ لَنَا نُوْرَنَا وَ
اغْفِرْ لَنَا ۚ اِنَّكَ عَلٰي كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيْرٌ ۝ (التحريم : ٨)

"O Believers,
turn to God in unalloyed repentance.
He may relieve you of your ills and
admit you to gardens with rivers beneath them.
On the Day of Requital
God will not disappoint His Prophet,

*Note 27 under verse 18, Tafheemul Quran.

nor those who shared his faith.
Their light will shine
ahead of them and beside them as they pray.
"O God, keep our light intact
and grant us pardon
for you are the master of all". (66 : 8)

*"The words used in the text are *taubatun nasuhah*. The word *nasuhah* in Arabic means sincerity and good-will. Pure honey is called *asl-e-naseh*, which is free of wax and other impurities. Sewing a piece of torn cloth and repairing it at the seams is referred to as *nasabatus saub*. The use of the word *nasuh* after *taubah* would mean, (*a*) to offer sincere repentance in which there is no element of hypocrisy, (*b*) to exercise forethought to avert disaster, (*c*) to repair the cleavage in one's faith, and (*d*) to turn one's life into a model for others. The Prophet explained the meanings of *taubah-e-nusuh* in the following words : 'when you have committed a sin you should feel sincere regret within yourself. Then in remorse you should turn to God for forgiveness and after that never commit that sin again'.

Hazrat Umar said : "Let alone repeating a sin after repentance one cannot even think of it".

Hazrat Ali once saw a bedouin repeating words of repentance in a great hurry. "This is fake repentance", remarked Hazrat Ali. The bedouin asked, 'What is true repentance ?" Hazrat Ali explained that there are six elements in an act of true repentance :

(*i*) You should regret what has happened.

(*ii*) You should discharge the duty which you have neglected.

(*iii*) You should restore what you have misappropriated.

(*iv*) You should apologize to the one whom you have caused injury.

(*v*) You should resolve not to repeat the act.

*Tafheemul Quran, Vol. VII, page 18.

(*vi*) You should dedicate yourself entirely to the service of God, so that you may experience the rigours of obedience as you relished the pleasures of transgression.

There are certain other aspects of *taubah* which need to be understood. "Firstly, repentance must be based on the consciousness that one has acted in a manner contrary to the will of God. Secondly, repentance must follow this consciousness directly so that amends are made without delay. Repentance must not by postponed. Thirdly, repentance is not something to be taken lighty. You cannot take a pledge merely to violate it. Repentance is the result of regret and if one lapses into the same kind of conduct after repentance the element of regret must be lacking. Fourthly, if there is a relapse, due to human weakness, the old sin is not revived, and a fresh resolve for the future is required. Fifthly, the memory of sin, however pleasurable, should evoke a sense of shame and fear of God through constant repentance".*

To conclude, I quote verses 111-112 from surah 9, which set out the terms of the covenant between God and man :

إِنَّ اللَّهَ اشْتَرَىٰ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَأَمْوَالَهُمْ بِأَنَّ لَهُمُ
الْجَنَّةَ ۚ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَيَقْتُلُونَ وَيُقْتَلُونَ ۖ وَعْدًا
عَلَيْهِ حَقًّا فِي التَّوْرَاةِ وَالْإِنْجِيلِ وَالْقُرْآنِ ۚ وَمَنْ أَوْفَىٰ بِعَهْدِهِ
مِنَ اللَّهِ ۚ فَاسْتَبْشِرُوا بِبَيْعِكُمُ الَّذِي بَايَعْتُمْ بِهِ ۚ وَذَٰلِكَ هُوَ
الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ ○ التَّائِبُونَ الْعَابِدُونَ الْحَامِدُونَ
السَّائِحُونَ الرَّاكِعُونَ السَّاجِدُونَ الْآمِرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ
وَالنَّاهُونَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَالْحَافِظُونَ لِحُدُودِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَبَشِّرِ
الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ○ (التوبة : ١١١، ١١٢)

"The truth is that God has entered into a covenant with the believers accepting their life and property and giving them in return the promise of paradise. Under this covenant the believers

*Ibid., Vol. VI, page 30.

strive in the way of God and offer the supreme sacrifice.
The promise of paradise, in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran, is irrevocable.
Who can fulfil a promise better than God?
So rejoice at the transaction you have concluded.
This, in itself, is a great achievement.
Those who subscribe to this revert to God again and again.
They obey Him and pray to Him
bowing, prostrating, and singing His praise,
and they traverse the earth in His cause.
They enjoin good and forbid evil.
Give them good tidings, O Prophet". (9 : 111-112)

The word used in the text is '*altaibun*', which literally means 'those who repent'. But the context in which the word occurs shows clearly that repentance is a fundamental characteristic of the believers. They repent not once but all the time. The rendering which has been adopted to convey the real spirit of the word is, they 'revert to God again and again'.*

A believer enters into a covenant with God with full sense of responsibility, pledging his life and property to His cause. But there are moments when he tends to treat his life and property as his own, forgetting that God is the real master. These moments occur quite often and man, ignoring his obligations, acts in a defiant manner. It is only after he realises, with a sense of mortification, that he has been guilty of a lapse, and turns to God in remorse that he re-assumes the responsibilities imposed upon him under the covenant. He seeks forgiveness and revives his pledge. It is this willingness to revert to God again and again, this readiness to resume one's obligations after having gone astray which distinguishes a believer and invests his faith with permanence. To expect that man should carry out his part of the contract consistently and flawlessly throughout his life without a single lapse would be

*Tafheemul Quran, Note 108, page 235, Vol. II.

setting an impossible ideal, considering how vulnerable and exposed to temptation man is by nature.

God has not defined a believer as one who never deviates from the path of duty. Indeed, a believer is one who returns readily to the right course after being led astray. Man has the capacity to rid himself of evil and to identify himself with good. In these verses the ability to repent has been mentioned as the distinguishing quality of a believer. The preceding verses refer to believers who have been guilty of something inconsistent with their faith and the first quality they are asked to cultivate is the willingness to turn to the right path as soon as they discover their mistake and not to persist in transgression lest they should find themselves completely enmeshed in a life of sin.